

**BEAUTY OF HEALTH:  
Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League**

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## Abstract

This thesis situates Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League of New Zealand within a contextual matrix of influences, including the ideology of aesthetics; the New Zealand art scene; burgeoning New Zealand nationalism, Imperialist colonial identity; 'first wave feminism', and the Health Camp Movement. In so doing it attempts to create a construction of identities for both the Sunlight League and Cora Wilding which leaves their agency intact. Rather than viewing these historical subjects as manifestations of a Eugenics Movement in New Zealand, as other works have done, this work goes deeper into the relevant historical contexts to show the work of both Cora and the League to be representative of a much wider hybridity of influences. The Sunlight League, while being portrayed as a Christchurch health organisation, is also understood in this work to have been a loosely bound feminist body that ran health camps which engaged not only in the New Zealand Health Camp Movement, but also in identity construction for young girls. Similarly the ultimate interpretation offered of Cora Wilding reflects multiple contextual influences, in that she is presented as an aesthete and an artist, a health activist and a feminist.



## **Acknowledgements**

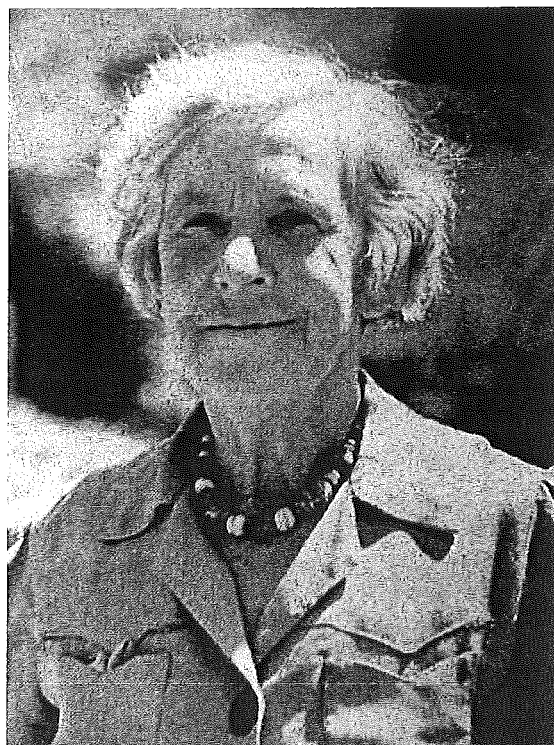
I would like to acknowledge some of the introductions which took place for this thesis to happen. I would like to thank Philippa Mein Smith for introducing me to Cora Wilding as an historical subject; Pamela Gerrish Nunn for introducing me to the works of Vernon Lee; Johanna Hermanns for introducing me to myself, and Katie Pickles for introducing me to the field of feminist history.

Further thanks need to be extended to my family - especially my generous maiden aunt who bought me a computer; to 88.4 Pulzarfm for providing the soundtrack to my studies; to Philippa Mein Smith for loaning me the New Zealand New Health magazines and providing a reference for the term 'solid sunshine'; to both Philippa and Katie for being the most supportive of supervisors; to Imagelab of Christchurch for providing the scanning of the visuals used; to Denis Rainforth, collections and building manager at the Sarjeant Gallery; to Derene Flood at the Y. H. A. N. Z. National Office, Christchurch; to the unhelpful government staff who led to my first choice of thesis topic being unable to be done which in turn led to this my second and far better choice of thesis topic being undertaken; to the territorial art historians who inadvertently encouraged me to be rigorous in my handling of art historical matters; to a philosophy department which offered such a negative learning environment that I had no choice but to jump ship in favour of history, and to all the feminists who unbeknownst to them, slowly chipped away at my traditionalist foundations leaving me in ideological turmoil with no choice but to abandon my potential career as an artist, in favour of one as a potential historian.

With hindsight, I offer the sincerest of thanks to you all.

Foreword:

Cora Wilding (1888-1982)



(Fig. 1) Cora Hilda Blanche Wilding (1888-1982).

'Cora Wilding (Canterbury Public Library, New Zealand Collection)', P. Sargison,  
Notable Women in New Zealand Health : Te Hauora ki Aotearoa : Ona Wahine  
Rongonui, Auckland, 1993, p.49.

Cora Hilda Blanche Wilding (fig. 1) was born to Julia and Frederick Wilding in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 15 November 1888. Frederick Wilding, a barrister by profession, was an accomplished sportsman who played cricket with great success while his wife, formerly Julia Anthony, was a pianist and had been involved with the British suffrage campaign before the pair moved to New Zealand in 1879. Cora was the youngest of five children. Her eldest

brother Anthony (1883-1915) was a New Zealand representative tennis player and was later killed in action during World War One. Cora had an older sister Gladys (1881-1905) and two other brothers, Frank (1886-?) and Edwyn (1897-?). Cora was educated at Christchurch Girls' High School (1901-2) and then at Nelson College for Girls (1903-4). In 1907 she enrolled at the Canterbury College School of Art and in 1912 she travelled to Europe for two years to continue her artistic education. During World War One Cora became one of New Zealand's first qualified physiotherapists in 1917. For four years from 1921 Cora again travelled abroad to paint and on her return was one of the founding members of the Christchurch 'Group' - a breakaway group of young artists. A further trip was taken to Europe in 1928 to study heliotherapy techniques for children and after this trip Cora formed the Sunlight League of New Zealand in 1931. The Sunlight League ran children's health camps and was the motivational force behind the Youth Hostels Association becoming established in New Zealand (Y. H. A. N. Z.). The Sunlight League eventually ceased to exist in the early 1950s but left behind a legacy in the Glenelg Health Camp which had formerly been under its care and the Y.H.A.N.Z.. In 1951 Cora moved to Kaikoura and in 1952 was awarded an MBE. From Kaikoura she continued to work for humanity, becoming more closely involved with women's organisations and promoting art as a means to world peace. She established the Kaikoura Art Group in 1955 and also organised children's art competitions between Japan and New Zealand. A retrospective of Cora's paintings was held at the Canterbury Society of Arts in 1971, the proceeds going to Te Wai Pounamu Girls' College. Cora also actively opposed the Vietnam War and rugby tours to South Africa. Cora died in Kaikoura on 8 October 1982, aged 93.

## Introduction:

## Boundaries/Borders/Skins

How the practical man loves to divide mankind into two classes - the practical person and the idealist!

But are we so sure that we have here a perfect dichotomy? Can the practical stand alone and unsupported by the ideal? May it be that Shelley was correct when he said, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"?

L. F. deBerry MA.<sup>1</sup>

Ideologies exist as bounded forms of knowledge and these forms of knowledge rely on concepts of inclusion and exclusion to substantiate their existences. In a way these knowledges exist only because they *can* draw a line in the sand which says 'here, and no further'. Borders, boundaries and skins are all symbols of this line drawn in the sand, a line which exists as an ideological wall, but often as not, an illusory and fallacious wall arbitrarily placed to re-inforce dominant ideologies and to undermine those that wish to supercede them.

Boundaries/borders/skins are spoken of as if they were in fact irrevocable truths and irreconcilable barriers but they can be seen to be, rather than limits of ideologies constructed by way of a centre and a periphery, spaces of fluidity where subjects interact and transmutation takes place. This applies equally to all forms of knowledge, from the divide between science and art, to the ideological break symbolised in the mapping of borders for countries and thus nations, the border of the frame of the work of art, or the skin which equally keeps races apart and acts as a boundary between self and other, or self and place. All these perceived boundaries are sites of ideological and literal interaction rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.16] [Box 2] 'Sunlight League Publicity: Press, Radio etc. 1930s-40s' [draft] L. F. deBerry 'Those Health Ideals', written under the auspices of the Sunlight League, to be released Wednesday September 12, n.d., p.1. Macmillan Brown Library.

opposition, where the question is no longer where do I end and you begin, but where are *we*, within a matrixial spectrum.<sup>2</sup>

In a reactionary stance to the masculinist discourse of psychoanalysis, specifically to the writings of Lacan and Freud, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger has spoken of the 'boundary' in terms of a 'matrixial borderspace' constituted by 'metramorphic borderlinks'.<sup>3</sup>

Psychoanalysis, for both Freud and Lacan, relied on the phallus as the ultimate signifier - in fact the signifier of signifiers, the symbol - which associated itself figuratively with the male body (explicitly in the writings of the former, implicitly in the writings of the latter).<sup>4</sup> Because of this, the male has been given power/phallus/penis within the discourse, while the female has been left with the lack of power/phallus/penis - in fact the very essence of being female has been understood to be outside of the possibility of signification and in turn the symbolic.

Ettinger wished to elaborate the idea of the symbolic by incorporating into it a sense of the womb, which in turn elevated woman into the symbolic. While the Lacanian model ultimately privileged the male as it was he who could experience the symbolic castration necessary to enter into the world of signification while the female could not, Ettinger's model, while also centring experiences of bodily awareness - having or not having a womb - took the pre-natal experience of being in the womb to be an experience of the symbolic shared by all in a way that the phallic-centred understanding of the symbolic could never be. Specifically she considered that the experience in the womb, rather than being that of an undifferentiated space, was that of a matrixial space of inter-relatedness which *preceded* the Lacanian entry into the symbolic and was in fact an entry into the symbolic itself that was later repressed.<sup>5</sup> In this way Ettinger offered a model which could equally explain, in theory, male and female development as both shared the experience in utero.

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Denning uses the metaphor of the beach to show the importance of the perceived 'boundary' as a site of unstable interaction. G. Denning, 'Performing on the Beaches of the Mind: An Essay', History and Theory, Vol.41, Feb. 2002, pp.1-24.

<sup>3</sup> See B. L. Ettinger, 'Matrix and Metamorphosis', Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, Vol.4 No.3, 1992, pp.176-208; B. L. Ettinger, 'The Becoming Threshold of Matrixial Borderlines' in G. Robertson, M. Mash, L. Tickner, J. Bird, B. Curtis and T. Putnam eds., Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement, London, 1994, pp.38-62; B.L. Ettinger, 'Metramorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace' in J. C. Welchman ed., Rethinking Borders, Minneapolis, 1996, pp.125-159; 'Transgressing With-In-To the Feminine', in P. Florence and N. Foster eds., Differential Aesthetics: Art Practices, Philosophy and Feminist Understandings, Hants, 2000, pp.185-209.

<sup>4</sup> Ettinger, 'Matrix and Metamorphosis', p.178.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177.

While Ettinger allowed that the oedipal and pre-oedipal stages in Lacanian development were a way into the symbolic, she considered them not to be the only way. Rather than attempting to over-ride the power/phallus/penis structure, she was interested in complimenting it with another possibility of symbolic signification, that of the matrix/womb.<sup>6</sup> Logically, however, the implication of this was that the very structure of the phallus as symbol, relying on a self/other distinction, was potentially undermined. The Lacanian structure of signification was instilled in the child through the mirror-stage, where the child realised through seeing his own reflection that he was a unique self within the world who had agency, which in turn created a structure for understanding the world based on a dichotomous understanding of self and other. While the Lacanian format saw self and other as always being opposed, Ettinger's structure saw the self always aware of the other as another self, or at least potentially so. She described the matrix as corresponding to a

feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural, and fragmented subjects composed of the known as well as the not-rejected and not assimilated unknown, and to unconscious processes of change and transgression in borderlines, limits, and thresholds of "I" and "not-I" emerging in co-existence.<sup>7</sup>

In this way, there was no self and other, but selves; there was no categorically defining boundary which said here and no further but a space which defined self/subject through a spectrum of inter-related matrixial metramorphoses, or interactions and engagements. Because of this, the knowledges constructed by way of boundaries that have relied on a dichotomy of self and other, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, have been undermined in their positions of authority.

While Ettinger's is a very interesting proposition, and one which I intend to work with in a very loose way, where the space of interaction is privileged at the expense of the perceived centres and where the emphasis is on female bodily experience rather than male, it does have some problems. By basing the interpretation on female experience rather than male, and in turn hinging that female experience on the experience of having a womb, Ettinger locked the female body into the grid of reproduction, just as the Lacanian and Freudian model

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.178 for Ettinger's description of her project regarding the Symbolic.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.176.

inadvertently did by centring a male body capable of sexual desire. Similarly the idea that the matrix represented a female experience, in a way backed up the gendered idea that women were men's polar opposite - that they were in fact men's other, but now men's other with a name. While she claimed that there were likely to be any number of non-phallus symbolic spheres it is notable that her construction of the matrixial sphere was gendered as the opposite of the phallus; the phallus was singular and same, while the matrix was multiple and different.<sup>8</sup> This type of gendering constructed the matrix/womb as nurturing and naturally peaceful, just as women have been constructed as nurturing and naturally peaceful historically, and this seems to undermine the potential of her analysis, falling as it does, back onto a masculine discourse of difference and biologically determined gendering. While Ettinger did not rule out a negative matrixial interaction the general sense is that these are empathic co-minglings which are mutually enhancing. However, whether or not Ettinger's analysis and re-construction of the subject's awakening to the symbolic is logically sound, or even as revolutionary as it may at first glance seem, it does offer a theoretical position, that of the border-space as a site of interaction (and in some cases friction), rather than a rigidly defined border-line which upholds the belief in the difference between self and other. This broad theoretical position is present in much contemporary theorising in both the social sciences and humanities, where a preference has been shown for a discussion of sites of interaction rather than of the opposition of isolated entities. Many of the works which have dealt with boundaries within the field of history - specifically feminist history - have been interested in constructions of identity, utilizing theory as I do here, as a means to uncover ideological constructions located in the past.<sup>9</sup>

The body has been centred in much theoretical work in the past few decades and needless to say it offers a multitude of perspectives for analysis, including the way in which the body is

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.178.

<sup>9</sup> Such a work would be A. Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London : Australian Women, Colonialism and Modernity*, New York, 2001 ; Philippa Wilson's Masters thesis also deals with this understanding of boundaries. P. J. Wilson, 'We Are Still English At Heart' : Constructions of Englishness by Englishwomen in Nineteenth-century New Zealand', Masters thesis in History, University of Auckland, Auckland, 1997 ; Many of the chapters in *Fragments : New Zealand Social and Cultural History* also discuss boundaries. B. Dalley and B. Labrum eds., *Fragments : New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, Auckland, 2000 ; See also D. Denoon and P. Mein Smith with M. Wyndham, *A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, Oxford, 2000 ; L. Fraser and K. Pickles eds., *Shifting Centres : Women and Migration in New Zealand History*, Dunedin, 2002 ; P. Mein Smith 'Blood, Birth, Babies, Bodies', *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 17 No.39, 2002, pp.305-323.

seen as a bounded construct both physically and symbolically. The body has been centred in these texts because as Wimal Dissanayake has explained, descriptions of the body are 'not the result of random effects or progressive enlightenment, but are based on various mechanisms of power that over the last two centuries have enscribed themselves on the body.'<sup>10</sup> And this is especially significant to the work done by feminists, because women's bodies are in many ways the sites of their oppression.<sup>11</sup> In Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body the question raised however, was 'where do bodily limits lie?', is the skin the bodily boundary of self, or does it include the clothing of the body?<sup>12</sup> The answer to this type of question, while being set within the bounds of the idea that bodies are located in the centre of power-struggles, also offers another issue for consideration, that of the limits (or lack thereof) of the self. The authors of this book clearly considered that the clothing of the body was central to bodily identity but that at the same time an analysis of dress proves to undermine binary mythologies pertaining to identity because dress draws attention to both the signified and the signifier.<sup>13</sup> Dress is in a way the meeting point of the cultural construct and the corporeal body.<sup>14</sup> Dress then, is a concept which can be located in the matrixial borderspace of identity. But it seems that dress is no more a meeting of cultural construct and corporeal body than is the skin, laden as it is with so many cultural understandings, themselves engaged in Foucauldian relationships of power.

As a demarcator of boundaries as well as proof of the continual transgression of those perceived boundaries, as at once physical limit and symbolic label, the skin of the body holds an interesting position within discourses surrounding the body. As a racial signifier, skin acts as an irrefutable mark of self, symbolically identifying the boundary within discourses between self and other, especially with regards to constructions of Empire. Both Anne McClintock and

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<sup>10</sup>W. Dissanayake, 'Body in Social Theory' in T.P. Kasulis with R.T. Ames and W. Dissanayake eds., Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice, Albany, 1993, pp.21-36, p.25.

<sup>11</sup>Foucault prioritised the body as the site of power from the 1960s, showing it to exhibit a problematic relation between signifier and signified. An example of a text that has discussed the (gendered) body in terms of the power of the (gendered) gaze in a specific historical context is C. Daley, 'The Body Builder and Beauty Contests', Journal of Australian Studies, No. 71, 2001, pp.55-66.

<sup>12</sup>A. Warwick and D. Cavallaro, Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body, New York, 1998, p.xv.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p.xxiii.

<sup>14</sup>The construction and cultural significance of dress has been discussed in a special issue of Gender and History. See B. Burman and C. Turbin eds. Gender and History : Special Issue : Material Strategies - Dress and Gender in Historical Perspective, Vol. 14 Issue 3, Nov. 2002.



Sarah Ahmed have discussed the skin as a mark of imperialist ideology in this way.<sup>15</sup> The symbolic ramifications of light and dark come into play in the construction of known and unknown, empowered and the enslaved, a point which Radhika Mohanram has made in her work Black Body.<sup>16</sup> While working as an ideological boundary within constructions of identity, the skin similarly works as an emblem of the divisiveness within society as a whole. The physical skin which covers the human body, exhibits the fallacious nature of identity in that it presumes to enclose the self and separate it from the external world - that there is in fact a comprehensive sense of self to be had - a point which texts like Fashioning the Frame, Black Body and Traveller's Tales have questioned. Rather the skin offers a point of transmutability, indicating what Ettinger has termed a matrixial space - that in fact the self and other are always really the self and the self.

Corporeally the understanding of the skin as a boundary shows the very notion of a boundary as a distinct line which limits to be inaccurate because as many writers have claimed, the body leaks and constantly transgresses its own boundary line.<sup>17</sup> According to Hayden White, the body always leaks and it is to the control of the effusions of the body that one must look to determine the basis of all Culture.<sup>18</sup> But it is to the fact that leaky bodies illustrate that the body is never an isolated site upon which ownership of the self can be enacted that I wish to draw attention here. The tanned body as cultural symbol also works to prove that the body is not set apart from its perceived environment. In the first half of the twentieth century it was understood that the reddening of the skin during tanning, was 'nature's red window' (where red was considered to be a colour that provided health) - the 'window', was where the goodness of the sun's rays could enter the organism, to kill tuberculosis from within as well as building muscle and strengthening teeth and bone.<sup>19</sup> The sun's rays, transgressed the

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<sup>15</sup> A. McClintock, 'Soft-soaping the empire: Comodity racism and imperial advertising' in Robertson, Mash, Tickner, Bird, Curtis and Putnam eds., Traveller's Tales, pp.131-154 ; S. Ahmed, 'Animated Borders: Skin, Colour and Tanning' in M. Shildrick and J. Price eds., Vital Signs : Feminist Reconfigurations of the Bio/logical Body, Edinburgh, 1998, pp.45-65.

<sup>16</sup> An excellent discussion of the discursive nature of blackness can be found in R. Mohanram, Black Body : Women, Colonialism, and Space, St Leonards, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> On leaky boundaries, see R. Longhurst, Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries, London, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> H. White, 'Bodies and their Plots' in S. L. Foster ed., Choreographing History, Bloomington, 1995, pp.229-234.

<sup>19</sup> Niels Finsen, a leading figure in the study of heliotherapy, considered burning to be nature's red window and indicative of the self-protective capacity of the skin. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.8] 'Correspondence 1928-34' [notebook] '1903' ; Tuberculosis was a primary concern because of its propensity to kill a

ideological boundary which defined the self as an autonomous entity via this window, displaying the self and environment to be linked rather than opposed.

Tanning does illustrate, as Warwick and Cavallaro claimed for dress, that the skin is always both indicative of the corporeality of the body *and* of the culture that that body inhabits. In this way, not only does tanning in the early twentieth century show the body to be open to its environment, but also that skin works as a cultural metaphor. The sun and consequent tanning practices, indicated a clean (tubercular and ricket-free) white body, when as McClintock argued about soap advertising, domestic imperialist fetishes centred around soap, mirrors, white clothing and light in the 1890s - one could add 'tanning' to the list for subsequent decades.<sup>20</sup> As Ahmed has claimed, tanning has implications for the clean white skin of the European which are different from the discursive practices associated with the natural black skin of the racialised other. The skin then, as a boundary, is elusive in that it lets in and it lets out; it is an imagined state of divisiveness which does not exist, but it is also a site of cultural signification.

Such is the state of all boundaries, they indicate contested ground within ideological structures, which represent attempts at forming illusory forms of identity - illusory in that they represent a way of seeing which works to enforce power norms which are otherwise incidental rather than central to understandings of existence. Because of this, I see the body to be situated within a matrix of interactions which constantly change it as well as constantly being changed by, the existence of the body within different locations. The body constantly interacts with its space - cultural space - but so too does the self constantly interact with place, and these are the types of ideas of self and place which I will be using in this analysis of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League. But first I would like to illustrate how an understanding of borders/boundaries/skins in terms of indicators of irreconcilable differences and ideological barriers can result in unsatisfactory representations of subjects in the historical past.

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community's youth and thus threaten the future of that community. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>20</sup> McClintock, p.132 ; Sunlight was referred to as the 'celestial antiseptic'. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183]  
[1.18] 'Heliotherapy Travis Bequest 1930s' [pamphlet] Sunlight and Health. Macmillan Brown Library.

Because of an apparent boundary perceived to be an implicit truth in the world and thus replicated in textual form, the two works which have ostensibly centred Cora Wilding as their subject have offered rather limited interpretations of Cora as an historical agent. The ideological division which the interpretations have hinged on, can be boiled down to the time-honoured and fallacious division between fact and fiction. Such a division is only ever possible, ideologically, when one focuses on the objects attributed to each category, rather than their causes, effects, interpretations or cultural significance - all of which can be seen to be more notable in their similarities than in their differences. Such polar opposites have a fine ideological thread which divides them and post-modernism, as well as feminist thought, has shown just how thin that thread really is. In the two works which have dealt solely with Cora Wilding, S. K. Wilson's thesis 'The aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League, 1930-36', and E. Mathews' Cora: A Wilding Seed, this division has manifested in the unintentional setting up of boundaries between Art and Science. This division becomes apparent in the constructions given of Cora and the Sunlight League where Cora's identity as an artist is seen to be in opposition to, or at least irrelevant to, her identity as a health activist. It is taken as a given, in both these works, that the discourses of Health and Art are ideologically incompatible. What I argue in the following sections of this thesis, conversely, is that specifically in the time frame under examination (1907-1950), these discourses were far from being incompatible and in fact overlapped - and moreover engaged with - one another in important and diverse ways.

Wilson's thesis was completed in 1980 and focused on the life-span of the Sunlight League Health Camps as run by Cora Wilding, 1930-36. Given that children's health camps were, by their very name, ostensibly concerned with children's *health*, this was the focus of Wilson's thesis, as it was for the later work produced by Margaret Tennant which centred the Health Camp Movement itself.<sup>21</sup> The wider context that Wilson identified as relevant for her discussion of these camps was inter-war eugenics, and as such, she considered health largely in

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<sup>21</sup>It is worth noting that Cora explicitly stated her preference for calling her camps 'holiday' camps rather than health camps, and this, in itself indicating the presence of different ideals to those implied by the name 'health' camp alone, was a point that neither Wilson nor Tennant considered in their texts. S. K. Wilson, 'The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936', Masters extended essay in History, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1980 ; M. Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth : A History of Children's Health Camps, Wellington, 1994.

terms of bodily fitness and racial purity.<sup>22</sup> Although she did recognize that the Sunlight League drew heavily from Greek ideals of fitness which saw the body, mind, and spirit as being central to an understanding of a healthy individual, in the way that Wilson discussed health she was clearly siding with a far more limited construction - a eugenically determined construction which centred the body as physical and bounded entity - at the expense of other interpretations which would have fitted her own evidence more comfortably.<sup>23</sup> The isolation of eugenics as a sub-category of bodily health (and to a lesser degree mental health) meant that all roads led to science in Wilson's analysis, at the expense of aesthetic and feminist ideological influences regarding concepts of health, that I consider to be far more relevant than a mere discussion of eugenics alone.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth noting that the very title of Wilson's thesis, proposing as it did to determine the singular 'ideology' of both Cora Wilding *and* the Sunlight League, presumed too much about ideological influences as unified and singular entities in preference to the easily hybridised, fluid entities which I consider them to be. This is of course to say that theoretical shifts have taken place between 1979 and 2002 which allow me to recognize the necessity of allowing for the mutation of theoretical entities which Wilson obviously took to be objective, unified and categorically stable truths. By intending to uncover the ideological truth behind Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League, Wilson was obliged to interpret all evidence to support a singular theory - eugenics - at the expense of other contextual influences and ideological borderspaces. While eugenics clearly is a relevant body of knowledge to study when analysing the motivations of any health organisation which was functioning in the 1930s, the Sunlight League, contrary to what Wilson's thesis described, was far from being an exemplar of the ideals of the Eugenics Movement.

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<sup>22</sup>The understanding that the Sunlight League was eugenically driven, following Wilson's lead, was also indicated in P. J. Fleming, 'Eugenics in New Zealand', Masters thesis in History, Massey University, Palmerston North 1981, p.61. MS-PAPERS-4442 Folder 02: Right Wing and Extreme Right Groups - 1920s-1950s. Alexander Turnbull Library. Angela Wanhalla also followed this interpretation. A. Wanhalla 'Gender, Race and Colonial Identity : Women and Eugenics in New Zealand, 1918-1939', Masters thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 2001, pp.110-124, esp. p.111, p.117, p.123.

<sup>23</sup>S. K. Wilson, p.14.

<sup>24</sup>Although while being relevant to a discussion of eugenics in any successful degree, Wilson has preferred to overlook factors concerning mental health or mental hygiene, which as a category, conflated bodily health with moral health in a way which converged on the psyche and was a very relevant body of ideals present in the first half of the twentieth century. As an example of these ideas, see W. Bramberg, *The Mind of Man*, New York, 1937.

Eugenics itself was a 'scientific' knowledge that centered the idea that racial heritage was in the hands of the individual, where ultimately racial improvement lay in selective breeding.

Eugenics was also a complicated set of beliefs that intersected with common understandings of health and society and is perhaps recognised now, as an ideology of the past, far more readily than it was actually articulated then.<sup>25</sup> However, eugenics has been described as having taken two forms, a positive and a negative form.<sup>26</sup> The negative form favoured institutionalisation or sterilization of those members of society considered to be unfit to breed where 'unfitness' was constructed in terms of a weak body or a weak mind, either of which could result in a weak moral character. These unfit individuals were found lacking in that all important ability, to contribute to society as a whole. Moreover, these individuals became burdens on the state which increasingly provided for the defective at the expense of the working members of society through taxation.<sup>27</sup> The positive form of eugenics, found in some of the writings of the Sunlight League, encouraged personal responsibility in breeding choices - those who were considered to be pre-tubercular cases should not reproduce as they would pass that disposition on to their children, whereas the fit and strong should breed for the good of the future race.<sup>28</sup> Needless to say these ideologies were involved with discourses of nationalism and imperialism and to a less obvious degree aesthetics, in that the 'fittest' were the most 'beautiful'.<sup>29</sup>

Given that hierarchical power structures always require a disempowered people to substantiate the illusion of natural supremacy for the elite, eugenics is merely another example of such elitism. Eugenics was thus an ideology which was used to support norms and patterns of

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<sup>25</sup>Philippa Mein Smith discusses, among other things, how the discourse of eugenics was manipulated to fit the ideals and motivations of individuals in New Zealand and Australia. Mein Smith, 'Blood, Birth, Babies, Bodies'.

<sup>26</sup>M. Sullivan, 'Regulating the Anomalous Body in Aotearoa/New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of Disability Studies*, No.1, 1995, pp.9-28, p.12 ; R. Watts, 'Beyond Nature and Nurture : Eugenics in Twentieth Century Australian History', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.10 No.3, 1994, pp.318-334, p.322.

<sup>27</sup>S. K. Wilson, p.16 ; G.R. Searle, 'Eugenics: The Early Years' in R.A. Peel ed., *Essays in the History of Eugenics*, London, 1998, pp.20-35, p.26.

<sup>28</sup>The intention of the Sunlight League was for personal (genetic) responsibility regarding the well-being of future generations. Prof. John Macmillan Brown wrote articles for *The Press* on this topic. See Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.16] [box1] 'Sunlight League Publicity: Press, Radio etc. 1930s - 40s' [newspaper cutting] 'A New Health Movement', *The Press*, April 11 1931, p.14. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>29</sup>The observations offered on Eugen Sandow in Daley's articles 'The Strongman of Eugenics, Eugen Sandow' and 'The Body Builder and Beauty Contests' illustrate this linkage between beauty and eugenics. C. Daley, 'The Strongman of Eugenics, Eugen Sandow', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 119, 2002, pp.233-248 ; Daley, 'The Body Builder and Beauty Contests'.

dominance within social structures. The 'unfit' or the 'mental defect' was as likely as not to come from the lower classes and it was those from the upper classes who took the time to label them as worthless human stock.<sup>30</sup> These eugenicists believed that there were people who were genetically predisposed to disease or to failure, and in this way they were able to deflect responsibility for the well-being of the masses. White women adopted eugenic discourses at the expense of the classed or racialised other (woman), to enforce their claims to legitimacy as citizens at a time when women's role within society was under debate and constant surveillance. New Zealand's inquiry into and subsequent legislation on, the mental defect in the 1920s is an example of the work of some women to disempower other women from their claims to motherhood, for their own advantage.<sup>31</sup>

In a way, eugenic beliefs were a common basic understanding amongst the New Zealand elite during this period and because of this, I would suggest that describing the Sunlight League solely in terms of the Eugenics Movement is a misleading approach to take. The elite of the Sunlight League believed in the new scientific knowledges, one of which was eugenics. These beliefs were often accompanied with a humanitarian sensibility that required the dissemination of knowledge for the good of wo/mankind.<sup>32</sup> This position was grounded in a loosely veiled belief in social evolution which saw science as a progressive force which would allow wo/mankind to evolve to a much higher and nobler form of existence. All that was needed was education in the new sciences, including the laws of heredity, for a stronger national and individual body and this was the reason behind the inclusion in the Sunlight League's 'Aims and Objectives' of an article which identified the importance of eugenics. Aim (h) stated that the education of society in the laws of heredity was to be undertaken by the technical advisors of the League, but this was only one aim out of ten, rather than being the central premis on which the work of the League hinged.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>This type of labelling can be interpreted in terms of medical stigmatization of the 'unwanted', uncontrollable and 'deviant' individuals, or groups in society. See T. Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness*, New York, 1970 ; M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. R. Howard, London, 1967 for ideas about constructions of deviance ; This type of 'othering' could also be linked to growing capitalism. See Watts ; M. Gleason, *Normalising the Ideal*, Toronto, 1999, p.22.

<sup>31</sup>See A. Wanhalla,, for white women's use of eugenics in New Zealand.

<sup>32</sup>This clearly comes across in the League's 'Aims and Objectives' which is reproduced on p.104 of this thesis.

<sup>33</sup>'Aims and Objectives of the Sunlight League', *The Sunlight League of New Zealand* [booklet] 1934, p.1 ;The aims and ideologies of the Sunlight League, are discussed later in this study, and are very diverse and indicate a breadth of influences.

The aims and ideologies of the League, taken in the context offered here, appear to indicate that a single focus on the Sunlight League of New Zealand in terms of the Eugenics Movement is to misrepresent the League and its founding member. In a way, *because* eugenics was a common discourse in the inter-war years in New Zealand, describing the Sunlight League as something worthy of analysis simply because it was an example of eugenics at work, when clearly it was an organisation which was involved in far more than this, has proven to create an unsatisfactory and unenlightening interpretation. And this is what Wilson has offered in her thesis. Moreover, while supposedly discussing the Sunlight League Health Camps, Wilson failed to discuss the article in the League's Aims and Objectives which explicitly referred to the camps. Aim (b), notably higher in the list than the article concerning eugenics, specifically spoke of 'beauty', 'nature' and 'citizenship', none of which were adequately discussed in Wilson's thesis. Rather than indicating a driving force of eugenics, 'beauty', 'nature' and 'citizenship' indicate feminist and aesthetic motivations behind the running of the health camps. When these qualities were mentioned by Wilson, it was in terms of a discourse of eugenics, where citizenship was taken to mean 'racial value' and 'civic worth'.<sup>34</sup> 'Racial value' and 'civic worth' are at best ambiguous terms which could have, in the time frame in question, equally have applied to a feminist understanding of *human*-racial value (which prioritised women's involvement in society as being an unequivocal good for that society and in turn for the human race) as it could have to a eugenic understanding of *white*-racial value (which understood whiteness to be in and of itself a positive quality for the make-up of society and was also closely tied to ideals of Empire) - this ambiguity of meaning was not considered in Wilson's thesis.<sup>35</sup> Whatever else this may indicate, it does prove to illustrate that texts cannot be taken at face value, and this is why analysis and contextualisation is an important part of the historical endeavour. By constructing the League in terms of the discourse of eugenics, and in turn taking health to be a bounded 'scientific' knowledge, Wilson limited both the League and Cora Wilding as historical actors and fell well short of recognising the very real and far more driving forces of aesthetics and feminism.

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<sup>34</sup>S. K. Wilson, p.28.

<sup>35</sup>Similarly the term 'betterment for the race' has been interpreted to refer to eugenic ideals by Wilson. The idea of the betterment for the *human* race, included a notion of social evolution which understood a liberal, democratic and pro-women society as a sign of progress in some of the contexts in which it was used - a notion which was certainly compatible with ideas of natural selection and eugenics - but this is far from saying that the phrase 'betterment of the race' was ideologically predisposed to referring to ideas of eugenics. Ibid., p.7.

The thesis written by Wilson was in many ways misleading, and this kind of misleading representation of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League led Elizabeth Mathews to offer an alternative interpretation, with a more favourable depiction of the humanitarian impetus of the work of the League in her own book. This book by Mathews, however, offered a similarly limited interpretation of Cora and the Sunlight League even though the scope of its discussion was far wider than that offered by Wilson. The argument put forward by Mathews, was essentially one that prioritised Cora's identity as an artist, but saw her work with the Sunlight League to be at odds with such an identity - I will argue that these two facets of Cora's life were complimentary and ideologically continuous rather than being mutually exclusive and oppositional. Whereas Wilson wrote of the Sunlight League Health Camps in a way that implicitly ignored and ruled out artistic, aesthetic and feminist influences, Mathews wrote of the health camps and the Sunlight League itself in a way that overtly ruled out the relevance of the artistic, aesthetic and to a lesser degree feminist contexts. Mathews inadvertently drew lines between the life Cora led as an artist prior to 1931 when she founded the Sunlight League, and the life she led as a philanthropic health activist between 1931 to the early 1950s when she left the Sunlight League. Mathews' discussion of Cora's life essentially constructed her in a way that necessitated the conclusion that Cora was a failed artist. Due to wars, familial obligations and the Depression, Mathews conveyed the idea that Cora was thwarted in her attempt to be a successful artist and that by 1931 society had won out over this strong-willed, individualistic woman in her 40s. While obviously the position of women within society did come into play in the life of women artists, and is thus an extremely relevant context to consider, within every set of limitations placed upon a member of society by that society there are choices. At best, Mathews allowed Cora an identity as a failed artist - society won. In so doing, just as Wilson had limited Cora's scope as an historical agent and subject by focussing on a narrowly defined understanding of health centred on eugenics, Mathews limited Cora's agency by restricting her analysis of Cora to rigidly defined categories of health *and* art - she claimed Cora to be a failed artist, and then again a failed health activist because the Sunlight League had fallen apart by 1950 by which time many of its objectives had not been met. Mathews however did not want to admit defeat for Cora, and thus explained that Cora was



only ever in things for the journey rather than the result and thus echoing the ideals of the modernists, could call Cora's life a success on Cora's own terms.<sup>36</sup>

Neither Mathews' nor Wilson's work recognised that there may have been relevant contexts to be found in feminism and aesthetics for the situating of Cora as an historical subject. They did not recognise these as relevant contexts because they adhered strictly to ideological boundaries which saw these contexts as outside the field of enquiry. But in this regard they were not alone. Feminism especially (as an historical phenomenon), has suffered at the hands of historians who have tended to demarcate a space for its study - as a political movement based on the idea that the 'first wave' of feminism in New Zealand was centred in the achievement of a women's vote - at the expense of a general existence of women's organisations that were considered to be beyond the boundaries of the study of feminism proper.<sup>37</sup> It is not surprising then, that neither Mathews nor Wilson considered feminism to be a valid ideology to look for in regards to contextualising Cora or the Sunlight League. While the situation is constantly changing, many works either study early feminism in terms of the body of political ideals circulating around women's suffrage and the historical narrative that follows, or, study women's activities beyond the time-frame of a narrowly defined 'first wave feminism', without making recourse to those women's ideologically feminist leanings or the manifestations of feminist-driven activities undertaken by those women.<sup>38</sup> Molly

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<sup>36</sup>E. Mathews, *Cora: A Wilding Seed*, Cheviot, 1999, p.41, p.45.

<sup>37</sup>Aesthetics and its lack of historical representation is discussed in chapter one.

<sup>38</sup>M. Woods' Masters thesis discusses this problem. See M. Woods 'Re/producing the Nation : Women Making Identity in New Zealand, 1906-1925', Masters thesis in History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1997, pp.21-6 ; The chapters in *Suffrage and Beyond : International Feminist Perspectives* are good examples of the types of history being undertaken which look beyond rigidly defined categories such as 'first-wave' and 'post-suffrage' feminism. The book however, for the most part is concerned with suffrage as a 'political' history, rather than as a cultural, intellectual or social history and thus this boundary is still upheld. C. Daley and M. Nolan eds., *Suffrage and Beyond : International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland, 1994 ; Melanie Nolan has discussed the role of feminist organisations post-suffrage in New Zealand in her book *Breadwinning*. This work, while acknowledging feminism as continuing after the vote, (the work of the Society for the Protection of Women and Children with regard to the allotment system during World War One being one example) has also centred feminism as an ideology that manifested in the public arena, rather than as an informal discourse. M. Nolan, *Breadwinning : New Zealand Women and the State*, Christchurch, 2000, pp.94-95 ; Philippa Mein Smith has discussed child welfare in Australia and in so doing made note of the maternalist feminist work that intersected with the work of volunteer organisations and local government, to form the Child Welfare Movement itself. P. Mein Smith, *Mothers and King Baby : Infant Survival and Welfare in an Imperial World : Australia 1880-1950*, Basingstoke, 1997 ; Conversely, Karen Blair has looked at the existence of women's clubs as proof of feminist activity in America, having written of the situation '... literary clubs have been ignored, dismissed as trivial or frivolous, or, at best, have been misunderstood as simply some of the many organisations formed at the turn of the century which were dedicated to civic reform and

Ladd-Taylor's Mother-Work, offers an example of how this type of division, between feminism proper and informal women's activities, has been enforced in the field of women's history.<sup>39</sup> In Mother-Work, Ladd-Taylor based her argument on the work of Nancy Cott and asserted that 'maternalists' and 'feminists' in America, belonged to distinctly different ideological groups and eras.<sup>40</sup> This division between feminists and maternalists was grounded in the understanding that feminists wished to gain economic independence in the public sphere while maternalists were concerned with the interests of women as mothers in the home. The time-frame discussed by Ladd-Taylor does not fit the New Zealand circumstances surrounding suffrage, but her work does illustrate a way in which suffrage, 'feminism' and the 'women's movement' can be separated out so as to allow for other types of agency for women working as and for, women, without ignoring a wider context of women's activities and worlds. Mother-Work did however, inadvertently draw up a boundary between feminism proper and the pro-women work of other women and organisations, in turn creating a lop-sided binary the effect of which is to leave the latter category disempowered.

The New Zealand situation, with women gaining the vote in 1893, has made the tendency to draw up a boundary for first wave feminism that sees it end shortly after the achievement of suffrage, disempowering for many women who were working towards the betterment of women after 1893. This division has in effect removed Cora and women like her, from the position of being able to claim an identity as a feminist simply because feminism was understood to be about suffrage and women such as Cora were not involved in agitating toward the vote. There is little scope in such a framework for a woman born in 1888 (as Cora was), five years before women were able to vote in New Zealand, to be permitted an identity as a feminist. This is however to overlook the small consideration that world-wide women were far from gaining the vote in 1893, and furthermore that the initial thrust of feminism in New Zealand was about more than simply the ability to vote in an election. When one looks at the complete agenda of the first wave feminists, one sees that there was far more to their

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improvement.' Blair viewed these clubs as a part of 'domestic feminism'. K. J. Blair, The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined 1868-1914, New York, 1980, p.4.

<sup>39</sup>See M. Ladd-Taylor, Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930, Illinois, 1994;

<sup>40</sup>Wendy Sarvasy has upheld this division in her work, considering it important for the recognition of the role of postsuffrage feminists in the growth of the welfare state in America. See W. Sarvasy, 'Policy Debate: Postsuffrage Feminism, Citizenship, and the Quest for a Feminist Welfare State', Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Vol.17 No.2, 1992, pp.329-62, pp.331-2.

beliefs than a demand for suffrage, and furthermore that these beliefs continued on in various forms long after the first wave was said to have ended.<sup>41</sup> This bounded construct defining 'first wave feminism' then, has worked to belie the fact that there was a 'post-suffrage' feminism in New Zealand and in turn has eliminated feminism as a viable context for women, like Cora, who were living in the first half of the twentieth century.

Without a recognition of both the ideological contexts of feminism and aesthetics, the activities of Cora Wilding are necessarily viewed as exceptional and in many instances as going against the grain of what appears in mainstream history. Cora has been presented in the guise of the woman 'before her time', or, 'ahead of her time'.<sup>42</sup> I would argue that no-one ever exists ahead of their time and to claim them as such is to overlook the relevant context that surrounded them. So long as women who succeed are considered to be ahead of their time, the contexts which supported them - in many cases the contexts of feminism, or even of women-centred communities of thought and action, irrespective of their political motivations - are going to remain absent from historical narratives. Feminism as a relevant historical, ideological context has been overlooked due to the arbitrary drawing up of boundaries that have excluded it from women's past, and it has also been kept from sight by the use of the

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<sup>41</sup>Concerns of the early New Zealand feminists, included gaining equality with respect to what were called 'women's disabilities'. These involved woman's inability to be elected to the house of representatives (until 1919), to act as jurors, or to be appointed as Justices of the Peace, as well as numerous other restrictions. Women were also promoting equal pay for equal work, equality in marriage before the law and equality in relation to access to divorce. While there was a strong focus on 'equality' as the goal, there were also concerns for women as individual members of society - there were advocates of dress reform and healthy living which saw the riding of bicycles and the abandonment of corsets as goals for the betterment of women. There were also those who spoke out for the encouragement of women to work outside the home, and for their work within the home to be recognized as important. On Women's Disabilities see 'Women's Disabilities' in M. Lovell-Smith ed., *The Woman Question: Writings by the Women who Won the Vote*, Auckland, 1992, pp.193-204 ; on equality in the workforce see 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' pp.139-143, 145-150 ; on equality in marriage see 'Marriage' pp.151-160 ; for texts relating to women's bodies see 'Dress Reform, Health and Sexuality' pp.169-192 ; on women working outside the home see 'A Plea for the Training of Girls in Special Directions' pp.137-138 ; on women's work in the home see 'Woman's Work in the Home' p.168.

<sup>42</sup>Mathews has identified this trend and has claimed, as I do, that 'No person is ahead of their time'. However, in failing to do justice to the feminist, aesthetic, and medical contexts, Mathews' work again locates Cora as a woman out of step with contemporary movements - or, by implication, ahead of her time. Mathews wrote, for example, 'Her ideas on mental health began with the children, and these ran counter to the ideas of the educators and disciplinarians of the time', which is itself an inaccurate description of the relevant medical context. Mathews also used the term 'genius' to describe Cora, which also worked to remove Cora from her historical context. She wrote, 'As in most people who show forms of genius, Cora Wilding's illuminations continually contradicted each other', again, the description is misleading because as this thesis shows, Cora's life was not one of contradictions. Mathews, p.11, p.115, p.127 ; For a discussion of the medical context which, conversely, supported these ideas about children, see Mein Smith, *Mothers and King Baby*, esp. chapter nine 'The Pre-schooler and Child Development', pp.218-243.

term 'ahead of her time'. To claim Cora, or in fact any woman as a figure ahead of their time, is not only to turn a blind eye to the context that allowed for their existence, but it is to trap them within a discourse that shows successful women to be exceptions to the rule where a male historical norm becomes the standard to which they are held up. Just as the term 'genius' worked to create the legend of the (male) artist beyond the context of a historical reality that oppressed women artists and excluded them from artistic privilege, so too does the term 'ahead of their time' work to take the successful woman beyond her historical context and in turn keep the average woman out of the historical narrative.<sup>43</sup> Are exceptional women to be the only women worthy of inclusion in the mainstream historical narrative specifically because they prove that most women are unworthy of historical note? Queens were the exception to the rule where the divine right was of kings, labelling a woman 'ahead of her time' turns her into the exception to the rule where the divine right is of the white middle-class heterosexual male.<sup>44</sup> Because of this, it is important to look for the contexts that explain the existence of historical figures, and in turn include historical realities that empower women as subjects. This is not to say that Cora was not an important and unique individual, but it is to say that she was thoroughly *of her time*. One of the main arguments being put forward in this thesis, is that the ideological contexts of aesthetics and feminism offer great explanatory power with regard to Cora's life and work and that these contexts ground her within a network of beliefs and realities that existed *in the past* and *of the past* which have to an unfortunately large degree been overlooked in the historiography pertaining not only to Cora Wilding, but also to the period.

Accounts of the period within the literature on New Zealand history, have not considered feminism to be a valid context for women living in the first half of the twentieth century, largely because feminism has been constructed as having embodied two waves, neither of which were breaking in the time-frame considered. Margaret Tennant's book, Children's Health : the Nation's Wealth, while being a valuable book in the field of child health and a good example of the move towards the practice of social history and moreover women's

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<sup>43</sup>On the construction of the male 'genius' see C. Battersby, Gender and Genius : Towards a Feminist Aesthetics, London, 1989.

<sup>44</sup>For a discussion of queens as 'singular exceptions' see A. Fraser, The Warrior Queens : The Legends and the Lives of the Women who have led their Nations in War, Markham, 1990, esp. 'A Singular Exception', pp.3-13.

history in New Zealand, did not consider the ideological influence of feminism in the running of children's health camps in New Zealand.<sup>45</sup> Because of this, Cora's health camps, although included by Tennant as part of the Health Camp Movement, have featured as anomalies to the official development of the Movement in New Zealand. In Tennant's text, Cora became inadvertently cast in the mould of the woman 'before her time'.

Tennant structured her representation of the Health Camp Movement in the same way that Dugald McDonald had structured his model of the development of the social status of the child.<sup>46</sup> McDonald defined the four periods in his model as : 1840-1900, when the child was a working member of the domestic economy and as such was not specifically under state control but rather seen as a chattel; 1900-1944, when the child was beginning to be understood in terms of 'social capital' - being seen as a future citizen, where the state began to actively legislate in favour of children's health and welfare; 1945-1969, when the child was identified as a 'psychological being' and focus was placed on delinquency problems and pre-school education; 1970 onwards, when the child was seen as a 'citizen' with specific rights as belonging to a cohesive stand-alone group within society. McDonald appears to have been arguing for a progression from the child as domestic capital through to state capital and on to ultimate emancipation for the child as an individual - or, citizen. What is apparent from Tennant's work, is that where she identified the types of health camps being run at any given time as corresponding to the changes in ideological position regarding the child as described by McDonald, Cora's engagement with the health camp movement failed to correspond with the trends described.<sup>47</sup> Cora's first tiny health camp was run in 1931 which should see it and those which followed reflecting the ideas described by McDonald for the period 1900-1944, which were a focus on the child as 'social capital' rather than 'psychological being' or as independent citizen. What we do find in Cora's camps was the belief in children as social capital which saw the psychological component of the child as being an important part of that potential social

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<sup>45</sup>Linda Bryder's edited books offer good examples of work done in the social history of medicine, although none of the contributors have considered feminism as a relevant context for consideration. See L. Bryder ed., *A Healthy Country : Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1991 ; L. Bryder and D. A. Dow eds., *New Countries and Old Medicine : Proceedings of an International conference on the History of Medicine and Health*, Auckland, 1995.

<sup>46</sup>Tennant quotes McDonald in her introduction. Tennant, *Children's Health the Nation's Wealth*, p.8 ; McDonald's article 'Children and Young Persons in New Zealand Society' can be found in P. G. Koopman-Boyden ed., *Families in New Zealand Society*, Wellington, 1978, pp.44-56.

<sup>47</sup>Which was at least in part because until 1936 Cora ran independent camps.

capital, as well as an emphasis on the rights of the individual child to his or her own psychological well-being, where the citizenship rights of the child as child, were placed to the fore. According to McDonald's model then, Cora's camps utilised 'future' understandings of the child in their motivation, so, Cora must have been a woman 'ahead of her time'.<sup>48</sup> This conclusion is at least in part due to Tennant having failed to consider ideological influences coming from 'first wave feminism' in her analysis of the Health Camp Movement.<sup>49</sup>

Feminism, specifically what Marilyn Lake has described in terms of the 'exemplary citizen' - an idea wrapped up in theosophical beliefs, among others - saw citizenship as a constructed ideal for men and women rather than as being just a democratic right.<sup>50</sup> Should Tennant have looked to the post-suffrage feminist context, she would have found that within 'citizenship feminism' the child was placed at the centre of the discourse of citizenship/identity/belonging far earlier than the 1979 International Year of the Child which was where McDonald located it in his model. Furthermore, as we shall see, 'citizenship' was a hugely important idea for both Cora and the Sunlight League. In a way, an awareness of a post-suffrage feminist context allows for an alternative narrative of attitudes towards the child than that offered in McDonald's model. The ideologies surrounding 'first wave feminism' and moreover 'post-suffrage' feminism go at least part way in explaining the activities of independent women such as Cora, who held informal attitudes towards children and ran health camps that understood citizenship in terms of bodily, mental, and moral health and well-being. Tennant's work then, offered an example of the kind of boundary inadvertently drawn up within historical structures that has situated feminist ideology as a relevant context to women's suffrage only, and not to the New Zealand historical narrative much beyond 1893. Feminism then, and ideas about women, citizenship and identity, will be among the influences considered in the following chapters, specifically those discussing Cora's involvement with the Sunlight League and the running of health camps.

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<sup>48</sup>I will return to a discussion of Cora's experiences with the running of health camps as well as their ideological influences in the main body of this work, but at this stage I am using Cora's camps to illustrate the way that Tennant's work did not adequately accommodate the Sunlight League Health Camps at least in part because of how ideological boundaries were inadvertently drawn up.

<sup>49</sup>Ideological influences that are relevant to not just informal camps like Cora's, but also to the wider issue of state involvement in child health. Melanie Nolan's *Breadwinning* illustrates this.

<sup>50</sup>M. Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, 1999, p.7, p.51.

Both the description of Cora's life offered by Mathews and the description offered by Wilson are unsatisfactory because they have left out two contexts that I consider to have great explanatory power : feminism and aesthetics, while failing to contextualise Cora's work even in regard to the more obvious wider ideologies and activities concerning health in New Zealand. Similarly Tennant's work did not adequately explain the existence of Cora's health camps because it too did not deal with feminism as a context. By looking beyond the rigid definitions of health, first wave feminism, and art, which see these categories as being mutually exclusive and limited by the body, the vote, and the paint-brush respectively, taken by these two earlier narrators of Cora's history and found implicitly in the work of Tennant, it is possible to re-present Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League in a way which both allows Cora agency; a successful identity as an artist and feminist, and successfully reconstructs the activities of the League to show its unique position within the history of New Zealand. Just as this thesis centres a construction of matrixial borderspaces where boundaries are malleable sites of interaction rather than opposition, and in turn locates Cora and the League within such a matrixial understanding, so too does the disciplinary location of this thesis reflect a matrixial understanding of borders. In this way, while this thesis is primarily a work of feminist history, it also engages with the disciplines of art history and art theory, offering a narrative that is placed within an inter-disciplinary border-space, itself an appropriate understanding for the subjects considered. In the following chapters, I first explain how theories of aesthetics offer a bridge between the ideologies and practices of Art and Health to form a feminised discourse which allowed Cora Wilding to fit her artistic identity into a social position appropriate to that of an upper-middle-class woman in the 1930s. I then offer a discussion of Cora's life as an artist prior to 1930, taking into account the wider artistic context of both New Zealand and the Western World for the travelling colonial woman artist, followed by a discussion of her artistic merging with discourses of health which saw the formation of the Sunlight League. The Sunlight League itself is then discussed in the context of similar health organisations of the time as well as ideologies surrounding sunlight, nationalism, women and the child. The health camp movement is then examined and the Sunlight League Health Camps and Cora's experience of them are also placed in context. Overall, the ultimate representation of Cora Wilding offered in the following pages, is that not only was she a health activist and an artist, but also an aesthete and a feminist.

Chapter One:

The Beauty of Health

'We must forget that philosophy is a leisurely or bookish thing that has nothing to do with the workshop or studio', said Mr Somerset.

Art had held, in philosophy, a little corner of its own, known as aesthetics, the lecturer said. Aesthetics was divided into the three ultimate realities, - the good, the true, and the beautiful. The particular quest of the artist was the beautiful.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to a study of the gap between theory and reality, there is a relative lack within the literature on theories of aesthetics. By this I do not mean a lack of philosophical works which deal with theorizing and explaining the existence of the gap, but that within the literature on aesthetics, there is a lack when it comes to works which have deliberately focussed on historical reality - lived reality, as a manifestation of historically relevant theories of aesthetics. While there *are* works which have applied theories of art to historical contexts, these works have often left the reality of the historical past untouched. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's 'Kant's Ghost, Among Others' offers an example of this kind of work in that the primarily Kantian ideas of the 'sublime' and the 'beautiful' have been discussed in relation to the development of modernist art practices.<sup>2</sup> Like other philosophers of art, Gilbert-Rolfe has preferred to compare theory with theory, rather than theory with reality, as he has in this work re-interpreted theories of modern art into Kantian terms. While philosophers of art generally appear to have averted their eyes, feminists have embraced the gap between ideology and practice. Feminist writers of art theory have in recent years exploited the gap between androcentric theories and 'female realities' in an attempt to re-construct theories of art. This tactic has been used in Rachel Jones' 'Aesthetics in the Gaps - Subverting the Sublime for a

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<sup>1</sup> Baverstock Papers [MB 51] [ie] 'New Zealand Society of Artists Papers, Catalogues, Press Cuttings 1933-35' [newspaper article] "Beauty cannot be determined" : Expression of meaning or feeling, says lecturer'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Gilbert-Rolfe, 'Kant's Ghost, Among Others' in Florence and Foster eds., *Differential Aesthetics*, pp.99-117.



Female Subject'.<sup>3</sup> In this work Jones has explicitly discussed the difference between theory and reality, but this she has done in theoretical rather than in historical terms. On the other hand, feminist art historians have discussed wider theoretical discourses relevant to art in relation to the past, but they have failed to look at the aesthetic theories themselves, as manifestations of particular cultural and historical settings. Feminist art historians have been all too aware of the problems in applying patriarchally constructed ideologies of art and the 'art historical canon' to women artists (Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker have made this exact point), but what they have not done is to look at the use of aesthetic theory itself, as located in the past.<sup>4</sup> In their co-written book Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, Pollock and Parker drew attention to the need for explicitly locating the woman artist within a socially constructed past to reveal her oppression in the gap between (gendered) theory, and gendered reality. This same need as identified by Pollock and Parker is likely to be present with regards to art theory, but to date it appears to have been overlooked as an area for investigation.<sup>5</sup> Feminist historians such as those featured in the edited collection Gendered Domains, or Linda Kerber in her article 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place', among others, have successfully written on the ideology of the 'separate spheres', analysing it in relation to the lived past.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, these historians have drawn attention to the gap between theory and reality, like Pollock and Parker, finding that in specific historical settings the gap can be more enlightening than the ideology which has allowed for it. The work done by feminist historians in relation to the separate spheres ideology, is the type of research which is lacking in works pertaining to theories of art. Nowhere is this lack in research more apparent than when it comes to

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<sup>3</sup> See R. Jones, 'Aesthetics in the Gaps - Subverting the Sublime for a Female Subject' in Florence and Foster eds., Differential Aesthetics, pp.119-140.

<sup>4</sup> See R. Parker and G. Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, London, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp.48-9.

<sup>6</sup> Such works are most often written from the disciplinary position of 'gender history'. See D.O. Helly and S.M. Reverby eds., Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History, New York, 1992; L. Kirber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', Journal of American History, Vol.75, June 1988, pp.9-39. Other examples of this kind of work are: N. F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835, New Haven, 1977; P. Crawford ed., Exploring Women's Past, Sydney, 1984; J. B. Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought, Princeton, 1981; G. Lerner, The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy, New York, 1993; L.J. Nicholson, Gender and History: The limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family, New York, 1986. A work that has considered the everyday reality of theoretically embodied feminism in New Zealand, and has offered a discussion of the 'disjunction between theory and practice' which has gone beyond a simple analysis of the separate spheres, is B. Brookes, "When Dad Was a Woman": Gender Relations in the 1970s' in C. Daley and D. Montgomerie eds., The Gendered Kiwi, Auckland, 1999, pp.235-249, p.236.

ideologies present in the first half of the twentieth century, nor when one focusses on those ideologies as grounded in New Zealand's theoretically embodied past.

Cora Wilding was undeniably influenced by theories of art and aesthetics, and these can be seen to have directly influenced her activities and beliefs. Notebooks kept by Cora, contain numerous quotes from and references to, some of the more well-known theorists of her time. While she was likely to have come into contact with some of these ideas while studying at the Canterbury College School of Art, as well as at the various other schools she attended sporadically overseas, she would have also picked up ideas through discussion with other artists and thinkers while traveling. In a letter dated July 20th [1922], Cora wrote of having had 'most interesting talks in the evenings always and [that she had] learnt quite a lot about art theories.'<sup>7</sup> Given the richness of her personal contacts, combined with the intellectual climate, it is likely that these years of travel allowed for her engagement with some of the most important ideologies regarding art of the time. Direct reference was made in Cora's notebooks to the theoretical works of Tolstoy, Bell, and Plato, and the ideas of these theorists intertwined to contribute to her own ideas about art and society.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, some writers from the period who were not mentioned by Cora, such as Vernon Lee, appear to have been influential in the formation of her ideologies. Beyond art theory however, an engagement with the newly developing ideas of psychoanalysis informed Cora's activities. All of which, came into play to varying degrees in relation to the formation of the Sunlight League and its subsequent activities.

While there are many potential influences which can be taken into consideration when establishing the basis of Cora Wilding's ideological position, few can be actively proven. As I have noted, reference was made to theorists in Cora's notes, but there is no reason to believe that they alone influenced Cora to create a theory of Health and Beauty in the way that I believe she did. However, for the purposes of this discussion, it is enough to identify trains of thought that were common to both Cora and her contemporaries. There is always the possibility that Cora in fact never read Vernon Lee's work, and that the ideas I see manifesting

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<sup>7</sup> Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 37 Folder 173 'Outward Correspondence, May 1922-August 1922' item 73, correspondence to Mother, July 20th [1922] from San Gimignano. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>8</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.7] 'Notebooks: Art, Physical Recreation etc 1950s' [notebook] 'Cora Wilding Opawa Christchurch New Zealand'. Macmillan Brown Library.

themselves in Cora's actions and link to the work of Lee, were gleaned through unpublished sources, or indirectly through other adherents of Lee's ideology. But it is enough for the task at hand that the ideological position of Lee, as well as of those other theorists of aesthetics who appear to represent ideological influences on Cora, stand in for the other ideas that may have affected Cora's philosophical development. The relevant intellectual climate it seems, can be best articulated through the works of the individuals who espoused it, rather than by worrying about the specific path that knowledge took in reaching Cora. This is of course not to ignore other influences, some of which will be discussed later, but it is to say that for the purposes of establishing Cora's relation to wider bodies of knowledge, the examples given below suffice as a starting point.

Vernon Lee wrote a small text entitled The Beautiful which was published in 1913, the subtitle to which was 'An introduction to Psychological Aesthetics'. Interestingly, this text united the fields of aesthetics and psychology in a way which mirrors Cora's beliefs in beauty, and was perhaps instrumental to developing them (at the least Cora must have come into contact with these ideas in some form). According to Peter Gunn, Lee's emphasis on the psychological response to art, followed in the footsteps of the James-Lange theory of emotions.<sup>9</sup> For Lee, art involved a merging of subject and object, where art was a universal mode of communication, tempered by what amounted to both cultural and individual differences. While her argument was at times mildly contradictory, by arguing from the psychological basis of aesthetic experience, rather than from an abstract notion of an art object, Lee was able to retain a concept of experience which was continuous. The viewer of art for Lee, was reacting to the work of art, or nature, in essence no differently to the way that she reacted to the wider world.<sup>10</sup> Lee thus normalised the aesthetic experience, and in effect placed it in the reach of the masses. This is an important aspect of Lee's work when it comes to interpreting Cora's ideology, but for the present it is enough to say that Lee symbolically de-hierarchised the aesthetic.

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<sup>9</sup> P. Gunn, Vernon Lee : Violet Paget, 1865-1935, London, 1964, p.4 ; the James-Lange theory of emotions claims that when any emotion is rationally studied, the conclusion reached is that all one is experiencing are bodily sensations, or symptoms, Gunn, p.150.

<sup>10</sup> V. Lee, The Beautiful, Cambridge, 1913, pp.106-7.

It is perhaps pertinent at this point to introduce the author of The Beautiful herself into the text. 'Vernon Lee' was the pseudonym for the author Violet Paget. Paget initially wrote works of fiction, and progressively moved into studies of aesthetics. In works which have discussed her life, emphasis has been placed on what may, or may not have been, lesbian relationships between Paget and her women friends. Peter Gunn dismissed these relationships as homosocial, Burdett Gardner psychoanalysed Paget in the guise of a repressed lesbian, and writers such as Diana Maltz have interpreted Lee's theories via the lesbianism of Paget and her friend and theoretical collaborator Kit Anstruther-Thomson.<sup>11</sup> While being preoccupied with such intimacies of Paget's life, all these writers have failed to seriously engage with the theoretical implications of Lee's writing. Furthermore all are particularly harsh towards Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's theoretical position because it was based on the *bodily* experience of art.

Lee and Anstruther-Thomson based their theory on physical experiments. They gave out surveys to friends to establish a broad statistical base for the analysis of aesthetic responses, and enacted experiments themselves. In these, Anstruther-Thomson would place herself in front of a work of art and wait for a physical response, she would then describe this response to Lee, and Lee would interpret it 'scientifically'. In 1894, Anstruther-Thomson realised that her breathing pattern changed in the presence of great works of art and this confirmed Lee's idea that art could react beneficially upon the body.<sup>12</sup> According to Gardner, Anstruther-Thomson suffered from hysterical delusions during these physical responses to works of art (it is worth noting that Gardner wrote in 1954, and is thus a product of his time, implicitly linking women's bodies, madness and homosexuality within discourses of deviance); Dennis Denisoff has described Lee's construction of Anstruther-Thompson's experiences of 'empathy' as representing 'orgasmic rupture', while Maltz has represented Anstruther-Thomson as the producer of Lesbian-oriented performances where the Victorian upper-class were invited to view her body in the context of a gallery.<sup>13</sup> Maltz's analysis is the

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<sup>11</sup>See Gunn ; B. Gardner, The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style) : A Psychological and Critical Study of 'Vernon Lee', New York, 1987 ; D. Maltz, 'Engaging "Delicate Brains" : From Working-Class Enculturation to Upper-Class Lesbian Liberation in Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson's Psychological Aesthetics' in T. Schaffer and K.A. Psomiades eds., Women and British Aestheticism, Charlottesville, 1999, pp.211-229.

<sup>12</sup>Maltz, p.214.

<sup>13</sup>Gardner, p.216 ; D. Denisoff, 'The Forest Beyond the Frame : Picturing Women's Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf', in Schaffer and Psomiades eds., Women and British Aestheticism, pp.251-269, p.253 ;

most destructive towards Lee's theory of aesthetics. Maltz described the 'performances' as liberating for the lesbian elite, but in so doing belittled Lee's theoretical works by undermining their respectability; Maltz's representation viewed Lee's work as a manifestation of Paget's obsession with Anstruther-Thomson. For all intents and purposes, it appears that Maltz essentially discredited Lee's work on the grounds that it was non-masculine (that is body-oriented), and on the grounds that Lee and Anstruther-Thompson were attracted to each other and therefore could not critically devise a theory of aesthetics (so starry-eyed were they). Surely in both cases Maltz has attacked Lee and Anstruther-Thompson simply for being women (and Maltz wrote in the late 1990s and thus had no excuse for such shoddy prejudices). Whether or not a bodily-based interpretation of the aesthetic experience was 'valid' or not, it indicated a move away from the god-like-artist, masculinist interpretation of aesthetics - and Lee's work is worth celebrating historically, for that very reason.

By explaining the appreciation of beauty as an everyday phenomenon, Lee was at odds with philosophies like those established by Immanuel Kant, which saw the viewer of art in the position of 'disinterested interest'.<sup>14</sup> To Kant the viewer was interested in the work of art, conceiving of it as if it had a purpose, while at the same time recognizing its lack of purpose, and its lack of practical benefit. Kant's gallery attender, was not considering the financial gain should he invest in the work of art, nor was he considering the work as the product of artistic expression, but was viewing the work by way of what has been termed the 'cow-like stare' - the viewer's degree of conscious thought was minimal (presumably he remembered to breathe). By describing aesthetic experience in this way, Kant de-invested the experience of meaning in relation to everyday life. He lifted the aesthetic above the mundane, which reflected the general enlightenment belief regarding the god-like nature of 'genius'. Lee, on the other hand, explained the aesthetic experience using the same psychological terms that she employed to describe everyday experience (which obviously reflected the modernist concerns of the first decades of the twentieth century).

While ultimately reaching different conclusions about the aesthetic experience to Kant, Lee's text did mirror Kant's ideas, as well as those of traditional philosophy, in at least one way. Lee

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Maltz, p.213.

<sup>14</sup>I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by W.S. Pluhar, Indiana, 1987, p.46.

retained a distinction between the object, the work of art or 'thing', and the 'aspect' of the 'thing', or the aesthetic appearance of the work of art.<sup>15</sup> The object then, existed in both the realm of the known, and the realm of the seen. The realm of the 'known', was what Kant referred to as the 'noumenon', being the 'thing-in-itself', and as such, was only known by conception, not by perception.<sup>16</sup> The realm of the 'seen', was for Kant the 'phenomenon', which meant the 'appearance'.<sup>17</sup> This basic division came from Platonic forms. Lee used this division in a way which allowed for a multiplicity of experiences when confronted with an art object (or natural object, as she made no distinction between natural and artistic beauty). Lee allowed that the 'thing' (Kant's noumenon) was made up of numerous 'aspects' (Kantian phenomena), and that only one of those 'aspects' would result in the aesthetic experience of beauty. Notably the 'aspects' were consciously and unconsciously chosen by the individual as subject, rather than being predetermined by the type of object, as they would have been in the case of Platonic forms. By constructing her argument in this way, Lee could explain why some people responded aesthetically to an object while others did not. Those who failed to respond, were no less educated than those who did, nor were they devoid of taste, they were merely focussing on a non-aesthetic aspect of the work. Again, this worked to democratise the aesthetic experience, as well as placing focus on the *interaction* between the viewer and the work of art.

Lee's work, relying on the newly developing theories of psychology, placed the subject firmly at the centre of the aesthetic experience. Artistic appreciation was no longer a passive reception of beauty, but an active engagement with the work of art (or nature) on the part of the viewer. Where Kant had the viewer passively responding to the work of art, Lee had the viewer actively engaged with it, because for Lee, aesthetic experiences were like all other experiences, and thus active responses.<sup>18</sup> Kant's theory kept the mind separate from the body, by insisting on a state of mind which simply allowed one to 'look', rather than to 'see' whereas Lee, via psychology, could leave the mind and body joined. The mind and body related to one

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<sup>15</sup> Lee, pp.14-21.

<sup>16</sup> Kant, p.533.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.538.

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, this focus on active engagement with works of art has become a contemporary concern of some art theorists, they appear however, to not be familiar with Lee's work, or choose to overlook it, see for example A Berleant, 'The Aesthetics of art and nature' in S. Kemal and I. Gaskill eds., Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts, Cambridge, 1993, pp.228-243, esp. p.239.

another in the experience not only because the mind decided how the body was to see, even if unconsciously (what 'aspect' to consider), but also in that the body determined whether the mind would see aesthetically at all.<sup>19</sup> Not only did Lee centre the subject in experience, but she centred the body. The body, if unwell would not allow the mind to respond in a favourable way - for example, should the body have had a headache, the 'beauty' of music, would be incomprehensible to the mind. Moreover, the body was situated in the aesthetic experience because for Lee the aesthetic experience relied on an 'empathic' response.<sup>20</sup> Lee gave the example of a mountain which rises above the horizon, given that the mountain itself could never rise, she explained this tendency towards such descriptions by way of the movement of the head and eyes.<sup>21</sup> We raise our heads to view the tip of the mountain, and empathise with the mountain, or perhaps 'transfer' our experience to that of the mountain. The bodily activity then, had a direct part to play in the experience of beauty. The majestic beauty of the mountain was a transferal of our own experience of rising.<sup>22</sup> Not only did the simple bodily movement have repercussions for the aesthetic experience, but the whole experience of the individual in relation to 'rising' came into play.<sup>23</sup> Although Lee did not consider gendered differences which in a post-modern climate seem obvious to experiences of 'rising', she did consider cultural differences, and relational differences. The mountain from a distance 'rises', while the mountain under-foot spread itself out below.<sup>24</sup> Climbing a mountain then, implied a feminizing of the landscape, the turning of a rising object into a spreading one. However, the focus of Lee's discussion was not on the gendered descriptions she inadvertently gave of mountains and aesthetics, but on the embodied subjectivity of the viewer of art/nature.

In opposition to the disinterestedness of Kant's cow-like stare, Lee looked at the aesthetic experience as one which involved the mind and body of the individual subject. Lee incorporated Kant's disinterestedness into her interpretation of aesthetic experience in conjunction with an active (unconscious) appraisal of the form and content of the work. The

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<sup>19</sup>Lee, pp.133-4.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.59.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp.62-63.

<sup>22</sup>Although this type of 'beauty' may be best described as the 'sublime' for Kant.

<sup>23</sup>Lee, pp.64-5.

<sup>24</sup>The practicality of climbing the mountain, ie, having the mountain spread out below, stops it from being aesthetically experienced. 'Rising' then is aesthetic, while 'spreading out' is not. Ibid., p.70.

response to the formal aspect of the work for Lee was not unlike Bell's use of the term 'significant form', in that line and shape were the most important qualities of visual images. These were responded to by unconscious and conscious comparisons and evaluations between parts and whole, and the body responded by making minor adjustments of focal depth and head angle. The content of the work of art, again contrary to Kant, had an important part to play in aesthetic experiences. Where Kant's gallery attender stared passively at the painting on the wall, Lee's gallery attender related the painting to past experience, cultural preferences, engaged with the aesthetic aspect of the work - or not, empathised with the object based on those relations, and in turn responded to the content of the work. The work of art to be deemed beautiful by Lee's gallery attender was explicitly described as being more so, should it have been of a morally good subject.<sup>25</sup> For Lee, an 'even higher intensity and complexity of aesthetic feelings is obtained when the 'subject' of a picture ... is itself noble...'.<sup>26</sup> By incorporating content as a relatively important factor in her discussion of art, Lee again embraced the subjectivity of the aesthetic experience.

The Beautiful is also interesting in the relation explored between the aesthetic experience and well-being. This was not spelt out as such, but a definite relationship becomes apparent without too much struggle in interpretation. The potential place of art within a schema of well-being comes across in the following passage:

Intensity and purposefulness and harmony. These are what everyday life affords but rarely to our longings. And this is what, thanks to this strange process of Empathy, a few inches of painted canvas, will sometimes allow us to realise completely and uninterruptedly.<sup>27</sup>

Lee thus established 'intensity', 'purpose' and 'harmony' as the three things which all human beings seek in their lives, and by the construction of the concept of 'empathy', following strongly in the footsteps of psychoanalysis, told us that we interpret the image in terms of our own desires. The follow through of this idea, which saw the painting as a Freudian 'dream', was that looking at art, or experiencing nature, allowed for self expression. Self-expression

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<sup>25</sup>Where Lee allowed for cultural determination in regards to evaluating beauty of form, she does not do this explicitly in relation to evaluations of beauty of content.

<sup>26</sup>Lee, p.150.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p.83.



staved off mental illness, thus art was good for the psychological well-being of the individual. Later, Lee wrote: 'And perhaps the restorative, the healing quality of aesthetic contemplation is due, in large part, to the fact that, in the perpetual flux of action and thought, it represents reiteration and therefore stability.'<sup>28</sup> On my interpretation, this sentence conveys the idea that in works of art, the self saw the reflection of the self, not as a reflection in a Lacanian mirror, but in terms of a Freudian dreamscape. Rather than confronting the 'other' in nature, or in works of art, Lee implied that we confront the idealised self, and upon having our selfhood confirmed, or, 'reiterated', we find our 'real' self stabilised. This put art in a position of importance in constructing 'healthy' identities. In the final paragraph of the last chapter of the book (prior to the conclusion) Lee wrote :

The contemplation of beautiful shape is, on the other hand, favoured by its pleasurable-ness, and such contemplation of beautiful shape lifts our perceptive and empathic activities, and that is to say a large part of our intellectual and emotional life, on to a level which can only be spiritually, organically, and in so far, morally beneficial.<sup>29</sup>

She claimed then, that 'empathy' was inherently healthy in itself, and because the aesthetic experience centred on an 'empathic' experience, the aesthetic experience was beneficial. Whether this posed problems for the appreciation of art or not, in so far as the aesthetic experience was a part of everyday experience and yet the aesthetic experience itself was to be valued as 'special' and health giving, what this does prove, is that art was given the power, by Lee, to heal the mind and ultimately produce well-rounded human-beings.<sup>30</sup>

The focus on the body in Lee's work, allowed for the construction of an ideology which saw art as beneficial to well-being. As was discussed earlier, 'empathy' as found in The Beautiful appeared to accommodate the potential for art to be psychologically beneficial. Another work of Lee's, Laurus Nobilis, consolidates this interpretation showing Lee's 'aesthetic beliefs [to be] expressed almost entirely in terms of mental hygiene'.<sup>31</sup> The physical body however, was

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.109.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.151.

<sup>30</sup>Gardner considered Lee's crusade for mental-health via works of art, to reflect her concerns with her own mental-health, if one wants to follow the psychoanalytic path, the same could be argued for Cora Wilding ; Gardner, pp.524-5.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p.525.

also considered to benefit from the empathic experience. In reproducing the 'balance, rhythm, and weight' of the beautiful work of art, the art viewer herself physically experienced balance, rhythm and weight, which were considered by Lee to be vital needs.<sup>32</sup> Lee and Anstruther-Thomson, according to Maltz, 'posited a "beauty of health" contingent on their belief that a work of art exists to improve the viewer's physical experience of life'.<sup>33</sup> I would claim that Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League believed in this same type of 'beauty of health'.

This type of focus on the body, was as central to Cora's aesthetics as it was to Lee's. Cora's belief in the physical and psychological benefit of the aesthetic experience paralleled the ideas, as discussed above, in Lee's writing. It seems justified then, to reinterpret the ideology of Cora Wilding in terms of Lee's type of aesthetics, rather than to dismiss Cora as an eugenicist, or simply as a club-woman, and this is what I am attempting here to do. It has been said that the downfall of Lee's belief in the healing power of the aesthetic experience, was that she believed it was available to all, encouraging gallery attendance as a general cure-all.<sup>34</sup> Lee thus followed the path of the missionary aesthetes of the 1870s in wanting to bring the aesthetic benefit to the working classes.<sup>35</sup> However, it has been pointed out that the lives of the working-class were in no way ready to accommodate the type of commitment of time and energy required to experience Lee's aesthetic empathy. If empathy required past experience to draw upon, then these working classes needed to have had past experiences of beauty. In due course, we shall see that while adopting Lee's ideology, Cora adapted the methodology so as to actively take the art/nature to the people, as well as the people to the art/nature, thus succeeding where it could be said that Lee failed. But there are other ideological influences to look into, first we shall consider the work of Clive Bell, a more well-known theorist, in relation to the works of Vernon Lee.

In the following year to the publishing of Lee's book, Clive Bell published his own book entitled ART. In a way, the two works were similar, both explained aesthetic responses in terms of an appreciation of 'significant form', and both considered the response to works of

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<sup>32</sup>Maltz, p.214.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p.215.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp.224-5.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p.224.

art to be emotional. However, where Lee claimed that the emotional response to a work of art was subjective, relative, and democratic, Bell based his construction of the aesthetic experience on elitist, universally subjective grounds.

Bell was specifically refuting democratic theories of art such as Vernon Lee's when he established a hierarchy of responses to art. The art critic, or Bell himself, was at the tip of the hierarchy and he alone reached the 'cold, white peaks of art'.<sup>36</sup> Where Lee allowed for a multitude of experiences of the object, and experiences of the aesthetic aspect of the object where the reaction (psychologically) to the art object was the same as the reaction to the world at large, Bell claimed that the aesthetic emotion was a special emotion all of its own, which was neither available to all men, nor was it in any way comparable to mere human emotions. Bell was explicitly going against psychological theories of art such as Lee's when he wrote:

If art were a mere matter of suggesting the emotions of life a work of art would give each no more than what each bought with him. It is because art adds something new to our emotional experience, something that comes not from human life but from pure form, that it stirs us so deeply and so mysteriously.<sup>37</sup>

Bell linked the artist to god and the artistic experience to religious exaltation : Art was the new Religion.<sup>38</sup> But like the old religion, it was only available to the few as first hand experience. The art critic then, was to be the mouth-piece of god in this hierarchised aesthetics. Furthermore, the next tier down belonged to those who had an emotional response to art, but did not have an aesthetic response.<sup>39</sup> This tier it seems, was set aside for those poor souls such as Lee who could not muster up the exultant sensitivity to experience the true nature of art. Those people were likely to respond to the subject of the work, rather than the form of it, which for Bell unlike Lee, was a travesty. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the rabble of the general masses, who had no experience of any sort from a work of art - the gallery attender who was more concerned with getting home in time for dinner than looking at the paintings.

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<sup>36</sup>C. Bell, *ART*, London, 1914, pp.168-9, p.33.

<sup>37</sup>Giving to one what one brings is exactly what I see Lee explaining art as doing ; *Ibid.*, p.244.

<sup>38</sup>'Art and religion belong to the same world.' *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p.35.

At the heart of Bell's hierarchy, was the concept of 'significant form'. While this concept lay in common between Bell's and Lee's texts (perhaps Bell was influenced by Lee in this), Bell placed it at the centre of his theory. Significant form, proved to universalise the aesthetic experience, it united cultures and eras where the only explanation for lack of experience in its presence, was lack of sensitivity. Where Lee allowed for cultural prejudices, as well as individual associations to determine the possibility of the subject experiencing an aesthetic response, Bell universalised the experience in an imperialistic fashion by way of the abstract concept of objectively identifiable significant form. Bell placed universals at the centre of his discourse. Paradoxically, although Bell's significant form was meant to universalise the experience so that a theory could be made of art, he used the existence of a (subjective) emotional state to identify the presence of that significant form. However, this emotional state was given as being universally available to all those sensitive enough to receive it, and this was what formed Bell's hierarchy. Bell's belief in a subjectively emotional universal state reflected the way in which art practice was developing. Bell wrote extensively on, and praised the work of, Cezanne, whose work was heralding the age of the creation of significant form in its own right.<sup>40</sup> When Bell's theory is contextualised and deconstructed, it unsurprisingly reflected a state of mind which allowed only for the 'elite' (read 'educated white male') to participate in its employment of aesthetic emotion. This is where Lee's theory differed the most from Bell's, in that Lee's theory was based on continuity of psychic experience, and thus art appreciation was logically less specialised and in turn universally accessible. Although Bell restricted the true appreciation of art to a few, he did consider it to be meritable to take the art to the people. Bell believed that even the smallest aesthetic response to art, even an emotive one, was beneficial to the well-being of mankind. 'Art', wrote Bell, 'is, in fact, a necessity to and a product of the spiritual life.'<sup>41</sup>

Given that the early twentieth century was still in the process of restructuring a de-centred universe, mainly around scientific 'truths', Bell intended art to become the new religion. Bell saw religion in terms of someone being committed to something that was not empirically true, and valued it as an important aspect of life simply because people needed to believe in

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<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.199-214.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p.76.

something. In a way, this opinion fitted with the implications of Lee's work in that both understood art experience and appreciation as important to human well-being. Lee explicitly saw art as important to psychological well-being, and when Bell discussed art and ethics, it appears that he too gave art a role in establishing mental well-being, even if he saw this as a byproduct of art's true nature. Art for Bell, was ethically justified, as it was the most effective means to an excellent state of mind - an 'excellent state of mind' was presumably a healthy one (whether this inadvertently associated 'health' with 'class' or not).<sup>42</sup> For the irredeemable masses, Bell recommended dancing and singing, for in their use of abstract form, they would allow individuals a degree of self-expression.<sup>43</sup> He even conceded that perhaps through contact with significant form, in time the less sensitive among us would learn to experience the aesthetic emotion (if only poorly) - perhaps we too, would hear the voice of the new god.<sup>44</sup> Bell wrote: 'If art is to do the work of religion, it must somehow be brought within the reach of the people who need religion, and an obvious means of achieving this is to introduce into useful work the thrill of creation'.<sup>45</sup> For Lee of course, while art could be brought within reach of the 'people who need it', the implications of this would be minimal, because for Lee the aesthetic emotion was already available to all of us. To Lee, Bell's new god already spoke to us on an everyday basis.

But Bell hardly allowed for the possibility of everyman achieving the status accorded the art critic, and thus his belief in bringing art to the people, reflected a desire to institute new power relations within society and to safeguard the role of the professional - although Bell's professional, was not learned but born. Bell's reluctance to include nature in his discussion of aesthetics, reflected his agenda of establishing the new art religion. Art was seen as being created by the artist, which gave it a communicable quality, nature on the other hand, was only allowed a communicable quality if it was seen to be made by the hand of God. An important part of the discourse of 'significant form' lay in its ability to communicate an emotion (specifically aesthetic) from the artist to the viewer. Because Bell was interested in establishing a new religion, he could not have nature representing the communication of the divine will of the old God, thus nature's significant form was incidental. When Bell spoke of

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p.114.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp.283-4.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p.291.

<sup>45</sup>Lee does not discuss the benefits of creating, merely of experiencing ; Ibid., p.283.

letting the people dance, he did so to allow them happiness, a chance to bask in the glory of the new religion, but not to engage with it.

Over ten years before either Clive Bell or Vernon Lee put their thoughts to paper, in 1898, Leo Tolstoy produced his book What is Art?. Although Cora read this work, it does not appear to have been as influential on her own ideological development as the other types of aestheticism prevailing in the 1910s. The main point of divergence between Tolstoy's work and that of other theorists lay in his rejection of the notion of beauty as being at the heart of aesthetics. The basic tenet in his argument regarding testimonies on aesthetics, was that the downfall of other theories resided in their belief in a basic principle of beauty, whether it be defined in terms of pleasure, or in terms of a divine mystification. 'Beauty' for Tolstoy simply *was* pleasure, and thus was not at the core of art, the core of art was its ability to communicate human feeling.<sup>46</sup>

The underlying focus of Tolstoy's work however, was on a dissatisfaction with class divisions which resulted in the privileging of the upper-classes when it came to aesthetic appreciation. What may be termed the 'myth of beauty' for Tolstoy, worked as nothing more than a tool used in the discourse of class struggle which saw the social elite retain their classed distinction through perceived privileged knowledge. Tolstoy's attempt to discredit the perceived power of the upper-classes saw him construct art as having its sole purpose and existence in its scope as a means for communicating feelings from the artist to the viewer. The art of the privileged classes, against which Tolstoy reacted, was in turn bad art - if in fact it could be called art at all, because its potential for universal communication was restricted by the simple fact that it communicated only to the elite of its own class (an argument which was of course based in a loosely-veiled attack on the power held by the upper-class), where art, by its (newly given) very definition required wide potential for the communication of emotion.<sup>47</sup> For Tolstoy, art in its purest form was to be found in lullabies and jokes, where its purpose was to communicate the basic human emotions from one to another and thus create a sense of harmony between peoples - Tolstoy's gallery attender then, preferred joking with his acquaintances in the gallery and singing drunken ballads for his appreciation of art, rather than

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<sup>46</sup>L. Tolstoy, What is Art?, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky, London, 1995, pp.37-38.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.55-79.

looking at the works on display which chances were, he could not even understand.<sup>48</sup> Where Tolstoy's concern with taking art out of the hands of the privileged elite was reflected in the aspirations of both Bell and Lee - if only superficially in the works of the former, the way he went about doing this varied from their methods considerably. Rather than proposing the bringing of high art to the masses for social betterment or even psychological betterment, he claimed that the masses were the ones who had a true grasp of and appreciation for art in the first place. Thus there was no point in taking working-classes to the gallery to experience the aesthetic, because the only true art was that which they experienced in their own homes - the art of the communication of emotion.<sup>49</sup> The agenda apparent here is that Tolstoy wished to save the world through the aesthetic experience, but that he conflated the idea of aesthetics with an empathic response towards mankind as a whole.<sup>50</sup> In this way Tolstoy also attempted to democratise the aesthetic experience, as Lee was later to do, but this he did in a way which re-interpreted the state of affairs in the world rather than actually attempting to change that state. He in effect offered an alternative language for the discussion of art, rather than engaging with other discourses already surrounding the art object.

What we do see in Tolstoy's work as being influential in Cora's take on aesthetics, rather than a dismissal of beauty, appears to be the focus on the peace-making potential of art - whatever that 'art' may in fact be. If art conveys a sense of communion amongst individuals via the expression of feeling, then art has a social purpose, and this is what Cora believed. Unlike Tolstoy however, she believed strongly that beauty was inherent in good art and intrinsic to a beneficial aesthetic experience, an opinion which certainly saw her siding with the likes of Lee and even Bell, rather than Tolstoy.

There is a wider context to be taken into account, which allowed these theorists to develop these ideas at the turn of the century at all. We are talking largely about the movement termed 'aestheticism' in Britain, which saw the rise of ideas about art which coined the phrase 'art for art's sake', and saw examples of 'decadence' and the rise of the 'dandy'. 'Decadence', wrote

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p.41.

<sup>49</sup>Although the artist, paradoxically, still retained a position in the artistic hierarchy above that of his audience in that the role of the 'artist' was constructed as "teacher of mankind" and a 'leading person' in mankind's forward movement towards the good'. Ibid., p.xxii.

<sup>50</sup>He wrote, 'Art ... is a means of human communion, necessary for life and for the movement towards the good of the individual and of mankind, uniting them in the same feelings.' Ibid., p.40.

Schaffer and Psomiades in the introduction to their edited collection, 'with its fascination with the unnatural, death, decay, the body, and the exotic other, continued aestheticism's interest in artifice, intense experience, the mixing of beauty and strangeness, and the desire to experience life itself as art.'<sup>51</sup>

For the most part, decadence has been associated with male aesthetes, their complimentary other being the 'New Woman'. Decadence and Aestheticism have also been considered to be the effeminate fore-runners of modernism. Women were alienated from the dominant discourse of aestheticism where 'femininity' was seen to be the ultimate object of beauty, rather than the woman who held those characteristics and feminine beauty was for masculine appraisal, not for women to experience.<sup>52</sup> Given that the ideas of aestheticism valued femininity (if not women themselves), it did offer a more female-friendly arena than did the masculinist ideas of 'high-modernism' which followed, and this is why women continued the aestheticist ideas into the 1900s when many male aesthetes had given them up.<sup>53</sup> There were of course counter-discourses to aestheticism, and what could be called counter-counter-discourses, the former being voiced by men against the effeminate dandy, and the latter voiced by women.<sup>54</sup> While there has been a division placed between the 'aesthete' and the 'new women', which sees the male aesthete in terms of a dominant discourse and the 'new women' in terms of a 'counter-counter-discourse', I would propose that those involved in the 'counter-counter-discourse', where in fact 'new women aesthetes'. While the main discourse was one of decadence, which sought to take art away from the middle classes and reinstate it in the place it had held in the enlightenment, there were other discourses, such as Lee's which wished to involve the middle and working classes, and tried to take the art to them rather than alienating them from it (as Bell's theory was prone to do). What this appears to mean, is that women such as Lee were aesthetes, but 'new women' aesthetes, and as such created a discourse which when the male discourse is privileged appears as a counter-discourse (or counter-counter discourse), rather than as a complimentary one. In opposition to the type

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<sup>51</sup>T. Schafer and K. A. Psomiades 'Introduction' in Schaffer and Psomiades eds., Women and British Aestheticism, pp.1-22, p.3.

<sup>52</sup>See K. A. Psomiades, 'Whose Body? : Christina Rossetti and Aestheticist Femininity' in Schaffer and Psomiades eds., Women and British Aestheticism, pp.101-118.

<sup>53</sup>Schafer and Psomiades, p.4.

<sup>54</sup>See A. Ardis, 'Netta Syrett's Aestheticization of Everyday Life: Countering the Counterdiscourse of Aestheticism' in Schaffer and Psomiades eds., Women and British Aestheticism, pp.233-250.



of analysis which sees new women and aestheticism opposed, I would say that these women were interpreting aestheticist ideas through their gendered world. I would say that Lee took the ideas of Pater (an earlier theorist) and Kantian aesthetics in general, and developed them further - incorporating the feminised body into her discourse, as well as gendering those ideas by a concern with health. Similarly, where male aesthetes tried to keep nature and beauty apart, Lee allowed for natural beauty, thus incorporating the woman/nature within the aesthetic discourse.<sup>55</sup> Writers such as Lee then, in her fiction as well as in her theoretical works, manifest in the gap between theory and reality. They accept male theories but re-interpret them into female terms based on the cultural context in which they live, rather than due to overt political manifestos - but the effect may be political nonetheless.

All these points then, work to substantiate the claim that Cora Wilding was an artist all along. She may have stopped actively painting periodically, but her 'soul' was of the artist. This is not to say that she did not have many roles in her life, nor that she did not feel a social responsibility towards the New Zealand people or to her family, but it is to say that none of this stopped her from being an artist, or more specifically, an aesthete throughout. British aestheticism explains her belief in the healing power of both nature and art, thus when she found social responsibilities calling by 1930, she established the Sunlight League of New Zealand, and consequently brought the Youth Hostel Association to New Zealand, both of which put emphasis on bringing people in contact with the aesthetic emotion, via nature and art respectively. These manifestations of Wilding-aestheticism will be discussed later, in relation to their at once broader and more specific contexts of health, bodies, Christchurch and burgeoning New Zealand nationalism, but it is important to see these things as having a basis in contemporary beliefs about the nature of beauty, and aestheticism. A body of theory supported Cora in her ideas, and I trace those ideas as coming from Vernon Lee, who as has been discussed, was a theorist whose works manifested in the gap between white male aestheticism, and white female reality. Cora can also be seen to take her ideas about the benefits of dance as an art-form and as a type of therapy from the writings of Clive Bell, while Tolstoy's general focus on the social worth of art can be seen as a further motivation. While these male theorists stopped at theorising, Cora brought these ideological discourses into lived

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<sup>55</sup>B.T. Gates, 'The Aesthetic in the Natural : Gertrude Jekyll's Garden Writing' in Schaffer and Psomiades eds., *Women and British Aestheticism*, pp.161-171, p.162.

reality for the children who went to her health camps, as well as for trampers traversing the Port Hills through the work of the Y.H.A.N.Z.. Whether she ultimately succeeded in her endeavours, or whether her beliefs were 'true', are ultimately incidental questions in a representation of her life and her ideological manifestations such as this work proposes to be. The masculine discourse surrounding art then, took on still another form, when Cora Wilding brought her Vernon Lee-esque ideas to fruition in the Canterbury landscape. This then, is the over-riding concept behind my re-presentation of Cora Wilding's life : she was an aesthete.

Chapter Two:

A Sense of Form and Strength of Line

(1907-1927)

Countries are said to exert an environmental influence on their own art development. This tiny land has affinities geographically with ancient Greece. The Peoples of both have common characteristics - vitality, energy, and initiative. Early Maori inhabitants were known as the "Greeks of the South", because of their physical perfection, and they evolved a very high and beautiful form of primitive art. Is it possible that this land now so neglectful and ignorant of art, may yet have something to contribute to the art world of the future?

Cora Wilding.<sup>1</sup>

Just as ideological boundaries used in the present can limit the interpretation of historical subjects, so too can ideologies present in the past restrict the categorical definitions considered appropriate for subjects in the past. While the existence of theorists such as Vernon Lee prove that the ideologies of Art and Health were not mutually exclusive, where a feminised discourse of aesthetics can be seen to lie in the matrixial borderspace of Art(/)Health, there is no indication that this was a common understanding regarding borderspaces in the past. In fact while some individuals shared Cora's belief in the benefits of art for health, clearly there was a wider understanding amongst the community that saw Art and Health as belonging to opposing spheres. Because of this, and because of the preference within the artistic discourse for the artist to be male, Cora's contribution to the Christchurch art scene was in a very real

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<sup>1</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.5] [box 2] 'Art: Catalogues, Reviews, Correspondence etc' [newspaper cutting] 'Murals for New Zealand - will artists have chance for self-expression?' New Zealand Listener, Dec.28 1945. Macmillan Brown Library.

way overlooked. During her own life it is likely that her reluctance to be publicised as an artist, her preference for holding exhibitions only for the raising of funds for good causes and the fact that she did have at least two active identities, that of the artist and health activist, all worked together towards the detriment of her public identity as an artist.<sup>2</sup> Gendered constructions of the artist as male leave the woman artist in the role of amateur dabbler and unfortunately Cora's involvement in social (women's) work and her general attitude towards her own art, would have re-inforced this interpretation and consolidated her identity in the gender-appropriate role of health worker. Of the numerous exhibitions held in Canterbury to which Cora contributed, very few reviews made explicit mention of her work. It is possible that Cora's lack of recognition as an artist of worth in the annals of the past, has led at least in part, to the lack of recognition given her in the present.

A similar preference for a rigid definition of what an artist should be, in research undertaken regarding the significant figures of art history in New Zealand, has led to the exclusion from, or at least a lack of appreciation for, Cora in the art historical narrative. While Cora was given attention as a Canterbury woman artist in White Camelias, the claim made was that in the 1920s she gave up professional painting and 'devoted her energies to community groups'.<sup>3</sup> As for Kirker's New Zealand Women Artists, Cora appeared in a brief passage on murals, and in other sections as a justification for the inclusion of other women artists rather than as an artist in her own right.<sup>4</sup> It seems then, that while in the past Cora was ignored at least in part because she was a woman artist, in more recent years, with the revival of a feminism which has sought to re-construct a women's past, Cora has again been overlooked because her more public and socially acceptable (for the time) role as health activist has foreshadowed her role as an artist. The problem then, for the acknowledgement of Cora as an artist, is that not only are the ideologies of Health and Art often considered to be mutually exclusive, but that within

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<sup>2</sup> Cora wrote in reply to a request for biographical details, 'I looked up 'Professional' in my dictionary where it defines the word as "one who makes a living by the arts..." But owing to my parents' generosity I never came into this category for when I earned money I always put it towards some object I was keen about', such as Te Waipounamu Maori Girls' College. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.5][box1] 'Art: Catalogues, reviews etc. 1880s-1970s' 'Questionnaire 113420'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>3</sup> It is of course unsurprising that mention is not made of her role as an artist of the social as collections such as this book are rather restricting in their definitions of 'art' and 'artist', and similarly a definition which requires Cora to either be 'professional' or 'amateur' is somewhat arbitrary, but serves to discredit the works she produced after this date and in turn limit her eligibility regarding the label of 'artist'; J. Coley et.al., White Camelias: A Century of Women's Artmaking in Canterbury, Christchurch, 1993, p.42.

<sup>4</sup> A. Kirker, New Zealand Women Artists, Auckland, 1996, p.31, pp.123-4.

historical narratives there is often an underlying incentive for a single identity for each subject which is unchanging through time.<sup>5</sup>

While the presence for ideological categories which rely on ideals of inclusion and exclusion are likely to be a contributing factor to Cora's omission from art historical texts, it remains that Cora was an artist. This constant dismissal of her value as a painter seems unfair considering the proportion of her life which was selflessly dedicated to painting, and that for all intents and purposes she was an accomplished artist. It is my purpose in this section, to establish Cora's role as a woman painter in the wider artistic context of New Zealand.

On the 18th of February 1907, Cora Wilding began attending Life Classes at the Canterbury College School of Art, she was eighteen. At the time she attended the school, Sydney Thompson was lecturing in drawing and painting, and it is to him that her painting style, with an emphasis on strong areas of light, has been attributed.<sup>6</sup> The school itself, was hardly a college of Fine Arts but more a general school for the artisan. The school provided courses on architecture and design, building construction, sign-writing, cabinet-making, English literature and maths, and needlework along-side those more identifiably artistic courses of painting and drawing, both from life and from the antique.<sup>7</sup> While obviously offering a diverse range of subjects, the actual training in the fine arts was relatively restrictive. Students were expected to learn the classical techniques of life-drawing based on an understanding of the anatomy of the human body, a practice handed down from Leonardo da Vinci. The works produced were intended to be technically sound, rather than engaging with contemporary ideas in art, such as impressionism and subsequently post-impressionism.

Cultural-lag goes part way in explaining this reticence in introducing teaching methods which encouraged artistic development rather than mimicry of antiquity, but another important factor to take into consideration is the small size of New Zealand's population at this time. This would have been a motivating factor in teaching practical art techniques rather than those

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<sup>5</sup> Although a history of aesthetics within New Zealand would surely see Cora identified as a central figure, such a history has not been written.

<sup>6</sup> Coley, p.42.

<sup>7</sup> Baverstock Papers [MB 51] [ic] 'Canterbury College Art Syllabus' Canterbury College School of Art Syllabus: 1909, p.8. Macmillan Brown Library.

of the Fine Arts, because New Zealand needed workers rather than artistes. The size of New Zealand dictated a lack of interest in the Fine Arts and although that lack was obviously lessening as the period progressed, it did manifest itself in the focus on practical skills taught at Canterbury College School of Art. The 1917 syllabus stated that the aims of the school were to provide for those who needed education for trades, fine arts, architecture and teaching, as well as to provide a general knowledge of art (for the last aim, read 'to work as a finishing school').<sup>8</sup> With this then, being the best on offer in New Zealand, a school which saw the products of its students in terms of its technical excellence rather than in terms of personal development or artistic expression (the works reproduced in the 'Syllabus' during this period were always grouped together with no indication of individual's work, let alone the attributing of that work to an individual student by name), it is not surprising that young hopefuls took their art to Britain and the Continent for a more promising training in the career of the artist.

In November 1910, two years after enrolling at the Canterbury College School of Art, Cora was attending the sketching classes of Margaret Stoddart. Stoddart was a recognized woman artist who produced seductively painted watercolours featuring flowers and landscapes.<sup>9</sup> Stoddart had experienced success overseas and was in the position of mentor to younger women artists like Cora and her friends Olivia Spencer Bower and Viola Macmillan Brown.<sup>10</sup> Stoddart continued to be of support to Cora artistically, accompanying her on sketching trips to Otira in the following years until the older artist's death in 1934. With Cora's interest in painting apparently confirmed by burgeoning talents, and probably with encouragement for a Continental art education coming from both Sydney Thompson and Margaret Stoddart, on January 5th 1911, Cora's father decided that she could go to England to study art and the date for her departure was set for February 9th.

While no reason was given for allowing Cora to go to England to study art in the 'Life Events Diary' kept by her mother, it was considered at the time that anyone undertaking a serious art career needed further education abroad. Her parents were probably as aware of this as Cora was herself. But there are other possible factors to be considered in relation to this issue. On

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<sup>8</sup> Baverstock Papers [ic] Canterbury College School of Art Syllabus : 1917, p.6. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the life and work of Margaret Stoddart, see J. King, Flowers into Landscape : Margaret Stoddart 1865-1934, Christchurch, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> J. King, 'Chronology and Exhibitions' in Flowers into Landscape: Margaret Stoddart 1865-1934, pp.9-13.

the one hand, it seems extravagant to send a daughter to the other side of the world to paint, when the conservative Christchurch society at this time, would have expected Cora to marry and raise a family. On the other hand, given that as Joanne Drayton has explained in regard to Edith Collier, it reflected favourably upon a well-off family to have both sons and daughters educated abroad, it makes sense for Cora to have had her trip financed by her father.<sup>11</sup> For a daughter, it was considered to enhance the chance of marriage - if she did not find a husband at 'Home' she would at least be more appealing to those eligible gentlemen in New Zealand upon her return.<sup>12</sup> However even this consideration seems likely to be only partly relevant in relation to Cora's story. While it would have been anticipated that Cora would marry, it was certainly not the prerogative of the Wilding family to marry her off in a hurry to the first young man that came along. In fact Cora never married, and like a lot of women artists from this period, appeared to have little interest in men romantically. While it may have had 'snob-value' to have children educated overseas, neither of Cora's brothers, Edwyn nor Frank, were educated in this way - but then perhaps a few successful children were enough.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as Shelley Richardson explained in her work on Mrs Julia Wilding, the Wilding family was liberal and progressive in its ideas about women.<sup>14</sup> According to Richardson, Julia Wilding saw in her first two children the hope of the future, turning Gladys and Anthony into the New Woman and the Noble Gentleman respectively. Unfortunately both of Cora's older siblings died in the early years of their adult life, but the same maternal influence would have been exerted on Cora as it had been on Gladys. Given that Julia had been an accomplished piano player, and believed firmly in the rights of both sexes to choose their future paths, given also that the Wilding family knew many intellectuals of Christchurch who would have promoted Cora as an artist among their own ranks (if only as an amateur) it is likely that the same reason for paying for Anthony to travel around Europe playing tennis (for which he was a New Zealand representative in the days before the sport turned professional), was the reason for allowing Cora to travel abroad to paint, not once, but twice. The progressive, liberal and

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<sup>11</sup>J. Drayton, 'Edith Collier : Her life and work (1885-1964) : vol.1', PhD. thesis in Art History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1998, p.29 ; this is also the reasoning favoured by Elizabeth Mathews. Mathews, p.46.

<sup>12</sup>Drayton, p.29.

<sup>13</sup>Cora's older brother Anthony was of course a successful tennis player. On Anthony Wilding see A. Wallis Myers, Captain Anthony Wilding, London, 1916 and L. Richardson, 'The making of a Champion : Anthony Wilding', Christchurch, 1999.

<sup>14</sup>S. A. Richardson, "Striving After Better Things" : Julia Wilding and the making of a 'New Woman' and a 'Noble Gentleman', Masters thesis in History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1997, pp.14-16.

passively feminist family context would have seen Cora supported in her role as a New Woman artist.<sup>15</sup> The reason seems to be, then, that being a relatively affluent family, the Wildings believed in Cora's ability, and could afford to give their children the best, in this case, the best being education and a chance at succeeding at 'Home'.<sup>16</sup>

Cora sailed to London on the *S.S. Turakina* in 1911 and on her arrival, went straight to the Lucy Kemp-Welch school at Bushey.<sup>17</sup> While in London she was witness to the Coronation procession and proceeded to meet up with the English friends and relatives of her family in New Zealand (as every good daughter should). After a period at Bushey, Cora 'went to Newlyn near Penzance [Cornwall] for 5 weeks and studied under Stanhope Forbes'.<sup>18</sup> Forbes' school was a popular choice for New Zealanders, Cora followed in the footsteps of Frances Hodgkins, Dorothy Richmond, Margaret Stoddart, Eleanor Hughes (nee Waymouth) and Mina Arndt among others.<sup>19</sup> Dorothee Pauli has identified two main reasons for the popularity of Forbes' school with New Zealand artists looking for an art education abroad. According to Pauli, the artist's colony in Cornwall run by Forbes and his wife, was popular with New Zealand artists primarily because he was a figure recognized in New Zealand as an accomplished artist.<sup>20</sup> His works were often brought to New Zealand, as in the 1906 International Exhibition held in Christchurch.<sup>21</sup> Also at this show were works by Lucy

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<sup>15</sup>'Passively feminist' in that while Cora's mother and father believed in the rights of women as citizens, they were not actively vocal on this matter publicly, and thus not engaged in the women's suffrage campaign. Richardson, pp.14-15.

<sup>16</sup>There are frequent references made in the Life Events Diary to Cora's health, with her Mother showing concern over whether Cora will heed the advice of Dr Irving (a prominent Christchurch doctor). The main concern of Julia appears to have been that Cora was taking on too much - diving, life-saving and sketching classes as well as working in the home. When Cora was busy at her art, Julia felt that Cora was well. It is possible that this concern with Cora's 'overexertion' reflected contemporary fears about the adverse effect on a young woman's reproductive capacity should she place herself under too much strain. Truby King was against higher education for women on the grounds that it would lead to among other evils, flat-chestedness. King discussed the problem in his 'The Evils of Cram'. See Mein Smith, *Mothers and King Baby*, p.106; Elizabeth Mathews considered Cora to have suffered a nervous breakdown in 1909, which saw her take time off before returning to Art School in 1910. Although there are no distinct references to what it is that is considered to be ailing Cora, it is possible to speculate that a concern with Cora's health, possibly her mental health, would be another reason for allowing Cora to study art, in this case abroad. Mathews, p.42.

<sup>17</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 1] 'Questionnaire 113420'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>18</sup>Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162 'Life Events kept by Julia Wilding' Item 1, 'Life Events Diary' entry for November 5th 1911. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>19</sup>D.E. Pauli, 'Mina Arndt (1885-1926) : Her Life and Work', PhD. thesis in Art History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 2000, p.113.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p.64.



Kemp-Welch, and it is likely that Cora visited the exhibition herself and thus knew these names by the time she travelled to London. While Pauli interpreted Mina Arndt's move in attending Forbes' school and then studying under Brangwyn at the London School of Art as being indicative of an alignment for Arndt with male British artists, Cora can be seen to align herself a little more with women painters in that her first port of call in London was the Lucy Kemp-Welch school.<sup>22</sup> The second reason offered by Pauli, as to why New Zealanders found Forbes' school appealing lay in the style of work produced there. According to Pauli, artists like Arndt (and later Cora), were drawn to Forbes' school because the Newlyn artists worked with traditional subject matter, and adhered '... to traditional standards of draughtsmanship, which made their 'modernism' palatable and respectable...' to New Zealanders because of their almost complete isolation from recent French innovations in 'high' modernism.<sup>23</sup> Forbes' school then, was in a sense an introduction to art abroad for the New Zealand artists who went there. Newlyn also offered a community which acted like a family away from home, and the environment itself was not unlike that found in New Zealand. While attending the school, Cora made many new girl-friends including it seems, Jessie Wilkin, one of the few women with whom she was to keep up correspondence throughout her life, or at least until the mid 1950s.<sup>24</sup>

When not attending classes, Cora appears to have been surviving very well, socially at least. Not only did she write home to her mother of the many young women friends she was making, but she also wrote of frequent visits to galleries and operas with old family friends such as Lady Von Haast who took her under her wing while Cora stayed with her in Vienna.<sup>25</sup> Cora was certainly gaining the well-rounded worldliness her parents may have hoped for for their daughter.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.109.

<sup>24</sup>Although it is possible that Jessie and Cora had known each other from New Zealand. Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 44 Folder 200 'Sent to Cora Wilding 1901-1970' Item 237, Postcard to Cora from Jessie, 19.9.13 Canterbury Museum ; Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.1] 'Correspondence: Family and personal 1880s-1970s' [correspondence] to Cora from Jessie Wilkin 1955. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>25</sup>Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162, entry for November 5th 1911 ; entry for December 5th 1911. Canterbury Museum.

Unlike Mina Arndt, who repeatedly returned to the Newlyn school during her visit 'Home' a few years earlier than Cora's, Cora moved on to Paris after five weeks under Forbes and left the comparative safety of Britain behind.<sup>26</sup> Paris was of course, considered to be the centre of the art world at this time and as such was full of foreign artists wishing to soak up the atmosphere of the Parisian avant-garde. While in Paris Cora stayed at a student hostel, 93 Boulevard St Michel, with thirty other female students of numerous nationalities.<sup>27</sup> Cora stayed in Paris for three months, during which time she was to meet the illustrious expatriot New Zealand painter Frances Hodgkins for the first time when she accompanied Owen Merton to dinner at Frances' studio.<sup>28</sup> In response to a request to convey her memories of Frances Hodgkins to E. A. McCormick in the early 1950s, Cora wrote:

Miss Hodgkins was living in her studio situated in one of those narrow intersecting streets between Boulevard San Michel and Boulevard Mount Parnesse in the Latin Quarter where most of the artschools[sic] and studios are situated. My memory was of rather a darkish large room with a little kitchenette opening from it... During my first week in Paris I looked at La Grande Chaumiere, Calarossi and Julian's all very large, and finalally[sic] decided to join Miss Hodgkin's class. Then a very small one of 4 or 5 English speaking girls.<sup>29</sup>

When asked to convey any remarks she remembered Frances as having made, Cora responded by describing how Frances advised her to take one afternoon off a week, to go across to the other side of the River Seine, '... and visit some of the many one man shews[sic]. She named a certain dealer and said some of Picasso's work was always to be seen there, and mentioned the names of Cezanne and other Post-Impressionists'.<sup>30</sup> She was to see the 'men painting today',

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. entry for November 5th 1911.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. entry for January 1st 1912 ; For women artists travelling to Paris, although it was progressively becoming the norm, such a trip indicated a transgression of boundaries in that they at once travelled beyond the bounds of their own countries, as well as crossing the ideological boundary which saw women belonging in the home. For a discussion of the position of women artists travelling to Paris, see S. Reynolds, 'Running Away to Paris: expatriate women artists of the 1900 generation, from Scotland and points south', *Women's History Review*, vol.9 no.2, 2000, pp.327-344.

<sup>28</sup>Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 37 Folder 170 'Inward Correspondence 1922-1967' Item 36, draft response to letter from E.A. McCormick 1951 Canterbury Museum ; Cora Wilding's Retrospective Catalogue of 1971 mistakenly claims that Cora became a pupil of Miss Hodgkins in 1908. 1/83A [Wilding Box] [Catalogue] Cora Wilding Retrospective Exhibition, CSA Gallery. Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. ; Cora also admitted to bewilderment in a talk given to Queen Mary's School. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.4] [Box 1] 'Texts of Addresses, Published Articles, Radio Talks etc.' [misc] 'Queen Marys'. Macmillan Brown Library.

to which Cora's response was less than enthusiastic, writing, 'I confess some of these shews[sic] I found bewildering[,] the percussors[sic] of a totally new approach to art expression.'<sup>31</sup> Cora eventually moved on from her time working with Frances because she believed in the necessity of working with the nude, which Frances never allowed in her classes at this time (possibly due to financial considerations), and thus Cora enrolled at La Grand Chaumiere - one of the more popular Parisian schools by the 1920s, which had been established in 1906.<sup>32</sup>

While the desire for intimate teaching contexts, where pupils get one-on-one contact with their teachers plainly appealed to Cora (this was a preoccupation for Cora in organising health camps later on), in her later visit to Europe, it was exactly this English-oriented intimate context which she sought to avoid. The first trip 'Home' (a term which was used to include the 'Continent' as well as Britain) was one which introduced her to foreign cultures which were essentially 'British', it was not until her second trip that she definitely sought out the exoticised, racialised, 'other' as the basis of her artistic experience. It is an odd situation which sees the New Zealand public identifying themselves with a British way of life that they ultimately have to experience as a tourist on their trip 'Home'. Angela Woollacott, in a discussion of Australian women travellers of the period, has described colonial women as being at once insiders and outsiders in Britain - insiders because they were British, but outsiders because they were from the colonies.<sup>33</sup> This unstable position within the Empire gave them certain privileges, specifically concerning the ease with which these women could travel and observe their surroundings because in many ways they were perceived as being outside of the class structure.<sup>34</sup> During this period, it was common for British and American alike to travel abroad and the picture which comes across for most of both of Cora's trips is that of a network of English-speaking people who traversed foreign territory and experienced it in a uniquely British way. Frequently Cora unexpectedly met up with other artists or friends while in one part of the Continent whom she only just left behind in another.<sup>35</sup> Such is the situation which

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<sup>31</sup>Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 37 Folder 170 Item 36. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>32</sup>R. Perkins, 'A Dictionary of Foreign Women Artists in Paris 1920-1930 : vol.1', Masters thesis in Art History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1994, pp.10-11.

<sup>33</sup>Woollacott, p.34 ; This saw colonial women in the role of the flaneuse. Woollacott, p.62.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p.60 ; Cora remarked on the difference between her degree of freedom and that of local women. Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 172 'Outward Correspondence, November 1921-April 1922' Item 62, correspondence to Mother from Cora, April 22. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>35</sup>The Sydney Thompsons being an example, and Stella Murray being another.

allowed for the British tourist to travel and at once feel at home, and this was the context of Cora's first trip. On her second, she intentionally sought to avoid the places in Europe populated by English-speaking people, because essentially they had become the norm and she needed to travel further afield to discover the exotic. In this way, Cora first had to study British culture as an observer, turning imperialism in on itself to experience the British as an alien culture, before she could assert her British identity and study 'truly' different cultures. Cora's desire to avoid teaching contexts such as those which like the classes of Frances Hodgkins were intimate and full of the English-speaking, displayed the move away from seeing British and American as 'others' to identifying herself with them enough to need to seek out exoticised experiences of the other first-hand. The attitude of Frances Hodgkins on this first visit then, can be seen to encourage the idea of the British tourist abroad, or even the New Zealand tourist abroad, in that rather than engaging with the 'Bohemian' work on the Left Bank, one was merely to watch its development, taking ideas back to the studio as prized trophies from the hunt. On Frances' advice, Cora was to be a distanced observer, a *flaneuse*, towards the modernist developments taking place within arms reach of her student hostel. However, such advice obviously brought Cora into contact with the Parisian developments, even if only as a passive observer.

After three months in Paris, Cora travelled to Spain stopping in Pau and Fonteralie, where she stayed in a convent.<sup>36</sup> In 1912 Cora attended the 'X Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte' in Venice, Italy, but the other numerous shows she must have attended on this trip remain unknown.<sup>37</sup> While in Siena in 1912, Cora sent a postcard to her mother stating that she was working eight hours a day at painting.<sup>38</sup> Whatever had been the initial reason for her trip, she was progressively becoming the committed artist. She continued travelling, stopping in Mimes and Carcassonne in the South of France, and returned to London on May 31st 1912.<sup>39</sup> While in England, she attended Tudor Hart's sketching class for two weeks along with Owen Merton and Maud Sherwood, and saw her brother Anthony play at Wimbledon in October.<sup>40</sup> She

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<sup>36</sup>Wilding Family : ARC 1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162, entries for June 1st and 28th 1912. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>37</sup>1/83A [catalogue] 'X Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte'. Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

<sup>38</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989. 124 Box 44 Folder 195 'Sent to Julia Wilding' item 77, Postcard from Cora to Julia Wilding, 1912. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>39</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162, entry for July 27 1912. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>40</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [Box 1] 'Questionnaire 113420'. Macmillan Brown Library ; Kirker p.80.

eventually departed from Port Said in Egypt, stopping in Japan on her journey home.<sup>41</sup> On the 18th December 1912, Cora's first trip 'Home' was over and she arrived in Auckland.

Cora's art continued to be of prime importance to her in the years immediately after her return, and her family was still supportive of their only surviving daughter's artistic career path. Shortly after her home-coming, a studio was completed for her on the family property at 'Fownhope', St Martins, Christchurch.<sup>42</sup> Cora also rejoined the student body at the Canterbury College School of Art where she met up with a younger set of artists.<sup>43</sup> Cora continued to go on sketching excursions: in May of 1914, she went sketching with Bee Wood, and from January 14th to the 29th 1915 she stayed at Otira working with Margaret Stoddart. In 1917 Cora's work was exhibited at the annual Art Society's Exhibition, with the comment in the paper describing the three works shown as being '... all broadly and strongly treated and exhibiting a nice sense of colour.'<sup>44</sup> However, World War One lay burdens upon Cora's shoulders that saw her painting take the rear in her consciousness for a time.

With the death of her brother Tony (Anthony), who was killed on active service in May 1915, Cora felt that it was her responsibility to work towards the war effort, and consequently decided to go to England to become a nurse. The role of the artist within the Empire came under question during World War One, especially for women. Frances Hodgkins wrote from abroad, 'As artists - we all feel our present insignificance in the scheme of things. Why work? Who wants it? Who cares?'.<sup>45</sup> Cora was also aware of these types of feelings but moreover with Tony's death she felt the motivation to take over from where he had left off as best she could. Cora's initial plans were strongly discouraged by both Frank (another of Cora's brothers) and Lord Liverpool. Frank, still involved with the war himself, wrote on 10 June 1918 that every person in England was another mouth to feed, as well as arguing that she should refrain from coming over because mother and father needed her.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Lord Liverpool advised her that she should stay at home and learn massage to help with the

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<sup>41</sup> Mathews, p.45.

<sup>42</sup> Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162, entry for March 27 1913. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., entry for Sept. 5 1913.

<sup>44</sup> Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162, entry for March 30 1917. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>45</sup> J. King, *Sydney Lough Thompson : At Home and Abroad*, Christchurch, 1990, p.61.

<sup>46</sup> Wilding Family : ARC1918.124 Box 37 Folder 169 'Inward Correspondence 1915-1918' Item 28, correspondence from Frank to Cora, 10 June 1918. Canterbury Museum.

returning soldiers, rather than becoming a nurse in England. Cora's duties were seen to be with her family, or at least with the returning New Zealand soldiers, rather than at the beck and call of England, and certainly not at the end of a paintbrush. Whether the influence of these men in Cora's life was enough that she would have heeded their warnings or not, two months later the New Zealand Government forbade all women and children from travelling to England, and Cora was stuck in New Zealand for the duration of the war.<sup>47</sup>

Cora thus proceeded to become a trained masseuse, beginning an eighteen month course in March of 1917 at the new Otago School of Massage and Medical Gymnastics in Dunedin, qualifying top of her class.<sup>48</sup> While the study of massage introduced Cora to the techniques of light-treatment, dance therapy and psychology, all important factors in the formation of her ideological position regarding health and well-being, it also saw her giving up the direct practice of painting, to contribute to the needs of society. In this, although massage was a new and suspicious discipline in the eyes of the public, she conformed to the gendered role of healer within the community. Cora, as a re-builder of the masculine body, engaged with the traditional role of women within nationalist discourses, that of the producer of male bodies. While this role was usually interpreted within war-oriented discourses to mean giving birth to, the men who would protect the nation, in Cora's case, as well as in the cases of thousands of other women working for the war effort, the role required the re-construction of the male body.<sup>49</sup>

Within the confines of the Wilding family at this time, Cora became subject to daughterly expectations. She did continue to paint, travelling to the North Island in 1919 and 1920, when it is likely that 'From Mt Egmont' (fig 2) was painted, but her role within the family was clearly defined in both her and her family's minds.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps to offset the expenses of her

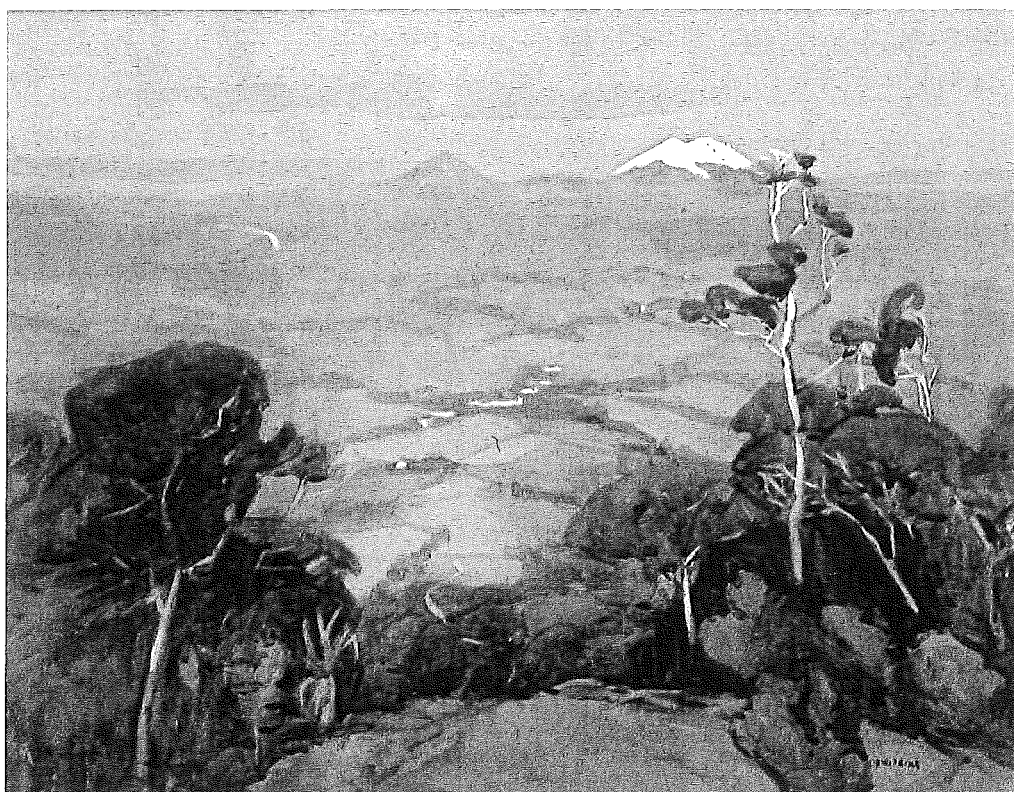
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<sup>47</sup>It has become part of the accepted story that Cora decided not to go to England on the advice of Lord Liverpool, linking her agency neatly to an authoritative father-type figure.

<sup>48</sup>Cora was one of the first six students at the Dunedin School. Mathews, p.51.

<sup>49</sup>For a discussion of the reconstructions undertaken regarding the male body surrounding the First World War see J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, Chicago, 1996.

<sup>50</sup>Evidence of this survives in exhibition catalogues which date works as coming from this period, see appendix A for a list of the works exhibited in Cora's retrospective exhibition. 1/83A [Catalogue] Cora Wilding Retrospective Exhibition, CSA Gallery. Robert McDougall Art Gallery.



(Fig. 2) From Mt Egmont c.1919/20.  
Watercolour on brown paper, 350 x 455mm.  
Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui.  
Donated by Mrs Robertson.

previous trip abroad, from 1913 Cora had undertaken the running of the family's expansive grounds, for which she was given 100 pounds per year to cover expenses.<sup>51</sup> While it is likely that Cora volunteered for such a role in the family, this does illustrate her shift back into the gendered role of daughter. Similarly shortly after Tony's death, Cora had decided that rather than paying for two maids, her mother was to let one go, giving the money saved to the Red Cross while Cora took over the work of the old maid. Furthermore, when the surviving boys did return from the war, 'Wilanda Downs' was purchased for her brother Edwyn and Cora, was shunted off to housekeep for him. Cora was certainly stuck within the discourse of the colonial helpmeet which viewed her, as she was not married (owned by another), as interchangeable property within the family. This is a circumstance which has been discussed by

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<sup>51</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162, entry for Sept. 5 1913. Canterbury Museum.

other writers in relation to other 'unsuccessful' women artists, in that their ability to paint, or, their *freedom* to paint, was always at the expense of familial duty and societal need.<sup>52</sup>

While it is true that on her return home Cora was trapped within the role of the loyal daughter - more than likely by the interplay of discreet power relations inherent in the cultural setting than through the specific demands of her family - the study of massage was far from being an alienating discourse for an artistic mind. The focus of the masseuse, was the body - the anatomically correct body, to which Cora had already been introduced at the Canterbury College School of Art, as well as at the Parisian art schools.<sup>53</sup> With the move towards athleticism and a focus on the beautifully proportioned body taking place, the Greek ideal of the sculptured body saw ideals of art and health overlap.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, massage was to be supplemented by the use of light. Light was the touch-stone for the Impressionists, and when accompanied by space, that of the Post-Impressionists. It was also the heartland of discourses which will be touched on later regarding nationalism and importantly, the development of a national style in the arts. The healing power of light was at the core of Cora's belief in the beauty of health - light worked to heal in nature, as it did in art, as it did in the hospital. Patient recovery required mental stimulation as well as physical movement, which led to the use of craft in what was called occupational therapy.<sup>55</sup> Within rehabilitative discourses surrounding massage, dance was considered to heal, as was basket weaving, both of which reflected the art critic Clive Bell's ideas on art. Thus the body in massage, was always seen as an embodied body, just as the body in Vernon Lee's theories of art, had always been subjectively embodied. As I see it, the study of massage for Cora, worked to enhance the ideas which related the body to art. As I discuss later, it seems in fact that Cora interpreted ideas of aesthetics such as Vernon Lee's in terms of societal needs and gendered roles and produced a slant on the discourse of the (en)lightened nation, to use light to determine the nation through the bodies of the men and women who inhabit the nation-space as much as through the artistic

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<sup>52</sup>Both the theses by Drayton and Pauli discuss this.

<sup>53</sup>According to Mathews, physiotherapy was regarded by some at this time as a purely aesthetic treatment. Mathews, p.51.

<sup>54</sup>The body was seen in terms of a raw medium waiting to be sculpted into a thing of beauty, especially the male body. See C. Daley, 'The Body Builder and Beauty Contests' ; D.J. Mrozek, 'Sport in American Life : From National Health to Personal Fulfillment, 1890-1940' in K. Grover ed., Fitness in American Culture : Images of Health, Sport, and the Body, 1830-1940, New York, 1989, pp.18-46 ; M. Budd, The Sculpture Machine : Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire, New York, 1997, p.36.

<sup>55</sup>For an interpretation of the use of curative work see Bourke, p.55.



representations of it. In a way, Cora's reaction to the societal impetus to return to a gendered role during war-time, led her eventually to justify her desire to paint through Lee's understanding of aesthetics which in turn, translated art into a discourse gendered feminine. And when one considers that the aesthete's manifesto was as often as not, to live one's life as a work of art, we see Cora as the most authentic woman artist New Zealand's history has to offer.<sup>56</sup> This line of thought aside for the moment, while Cora's training as a masseuse was in this context indicative of the position of the unmarried daughter within New Zealand, especially with regards to her role within a nation at war, it was also far from being a complete break from the world of art, or at least what was to become Cora's understanding of it. However, in 1918 the war was over, and her immediate duties fulfilled. The artistic life of the New Zealander abroad was again calling, and on October 15th 1920, Cora sailed from New Zealand, this time for San Francisco, via Tahiti.

The letters which survive from the trip to Tahiti, reveal the definite tendency of Cora to exoticise the other as artistic subject under a veil of beauty, as well as displaying the accompanying racism inherent in such imperialist attitudes. She travelled with family friends Ann Farrar and her brother, and an unidentified Kate. On 28 October 1920 she wrote to Edwyn from Papeete, demonstrating ideas common to most New Zealanders well into the 1960s if not after, explaining:

Then we know lots of the natives. I hate to see the number of half castes and although the native girls may be very charming, I think it most degrading to see white men taking these girls to dinner and marrying them ... My word I am proud of being English.<sup>57</sup>

These sentiments reflected the eugenic ideals of racial purity and hostility to miscegenation, which understood the half-caste to exhibit the worst aspects of both races. Cora expressed similar sentiments when she arrived in Italy in late 1921, when she was surprised to find a

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<sup>56</sup>See for example the ideas of Krause in relation to a construction of life as art, who Tolstoy described as having believed that 'The highest stage of art is the art of life, which directs its activity to the adornment of life, so as to make it a beautiful place for the beautiful man to live.' Tolstoy, p.22.

<sup>57</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 171 'Outward Correspondence, 1920 from Tahiti' Item 42, correspondence to Edwyn from Cora, Papeete Oct. 28 [1920]. Canterbury Museum.

well-bred English woman marrying an Italian. She was however, quick to point out that he was North Italian, rather than Sicilian.

Sicilians are of course a much lower Class ['Class' is written over 'Grade'] than the Northern Italians, and perhaps the high class Sicilian may be very nice. Sicilian are such a mixture beside Greek and Roman and Norman and Phoenician there is a very strong Saracemic strain in the people.<sup>58</sup>

This excerpt, from another letter, shows the merging of reasons for the defining of the cultural 'other'. Class and race are seen as merging in the construction, showing the Darwinian basis of such judgements in that weaker gene pools will naturally inhabit the lower classes.

Ideologically however, the existence of the half-caste was a threat because if the 'other' failed to remain fully othered, then the construct of the self came under threat. For Cora then, it was easier to see the exotic other as a beautiful object, rather than a human-being, or a mix of self and other (in the case of the half-caste), because drawing attention to such merging of identities, or, crossing of boundaries, would mean admitting the uneasy nature of a British identity for those living and in fact born in, the South Pacific. On December 15, in a letter to her Mother, Cora wrote:

However I mustn't criticise other nationalities as I have always loved to meet French girls and have liked them immensely. I love the way they put on their clothes and I don't feel over proud that I put on my clothes in my dowdy old English way. In places like this one wishes that in order to do credit to dear old England that one could put on clothes like Ella Helmore, be good at repartee like Mary [McClean] have the looks and charm of an Iris Studholme.<sup>59</sup>

Notably her justification for not judging *all* nationalities adversely, was that the white-skinned French were beautiful, or at least produced beautiful women. While skin-colour saved the French from being defined as exotic others, it is interesting that the most exotic of the dark-skinned were deemed to have artistic worth as subjects for painting (to be themselves beautiful), or in effect, seen as objects of contemplation rather than as subjects themselves.

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<sup>58</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 172 Item 48, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Italy 25 Nov. [1921]. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>59</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 171 Item 46, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Tahiti Dec. 15 [1920]. Canterbury Museum.

These ideas came across even more strongly in later years when Cora wrote with reference to the Tahitians on this trip that 'Their colour is usually a warm rich brown wonderful to paint, with its fine shadows and blue highlights'.<sup>60</sup>

It is worth noting that the beauty of a French woman was a cultured beauty, which was at odds with the natural beauty of the exoticised other.<sup>61</sup> In effect the act of painting the exoticised other worked to tame the natural beauty, so that the painting itself was the work of cultured beauty. While both types of beauty would have had the same formal aspects for Cora, ideologically, one clearly dominated over the other and worked to enhance the discourse of imperialism. The exoticised other, the Tahitian, or the Sicilian, was a worthy subject for painting, but not for marrying. This type of discourse, relating class and race, worked to place the 'black' and the 'poor' within the aesthetic discourse of artistic dominance via beauty. Similarly, it worked to conflate the indigenous with the land. This type of painting, or perhaps better stated as this type of 'seeing', was as surely a product of imperialism as was the breeding of colonies.

Cora then, as an imperialist and a woman, as a painter and a tourist, constructed the 'native' as the other to redeem her dominance as white colonist.<sup>62</sup> Because Cora was a woman, the white-male discourse which saw male painters using women as subjects for their paintings was an uncomfortable fit without enacting a crossing boundaries regarding the gendering of the artist. While other painters in this period did overstep the gendering of the artist and subject by being women who painted women, Cora inhabited this space by being a woman who gave the native inhabitants the role of art object in her discourse of racial rather than sexual dominance.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Cora's works from this period tended to utilise children as subject. While this at once represented the cost of paying for a 'real' model, when children sat

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<sup>60</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 38 Folder 180 'Notes' Item152, misc. notes. Canterbury Museum ; Cora wrote 'we' are 'not paintable like the Spanish[sic] or Italians'. Folder 175 'Outward Correspondence, 1923, January 1924' Item 109, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Hacienda de Giro Malaga Oct. 14 [1923] p.3.

<sup>61</sup>It is unclear what Cora specifically thought of *French* Tahitians.

<sup>62</sup>This may be linked to what Angela Woollacott identified as Australian women travellers' appropriation of Aboriginal culture, which was undertaken to prove these women to be 'colonisers' not 'colonials'. Woollacott, p.175.

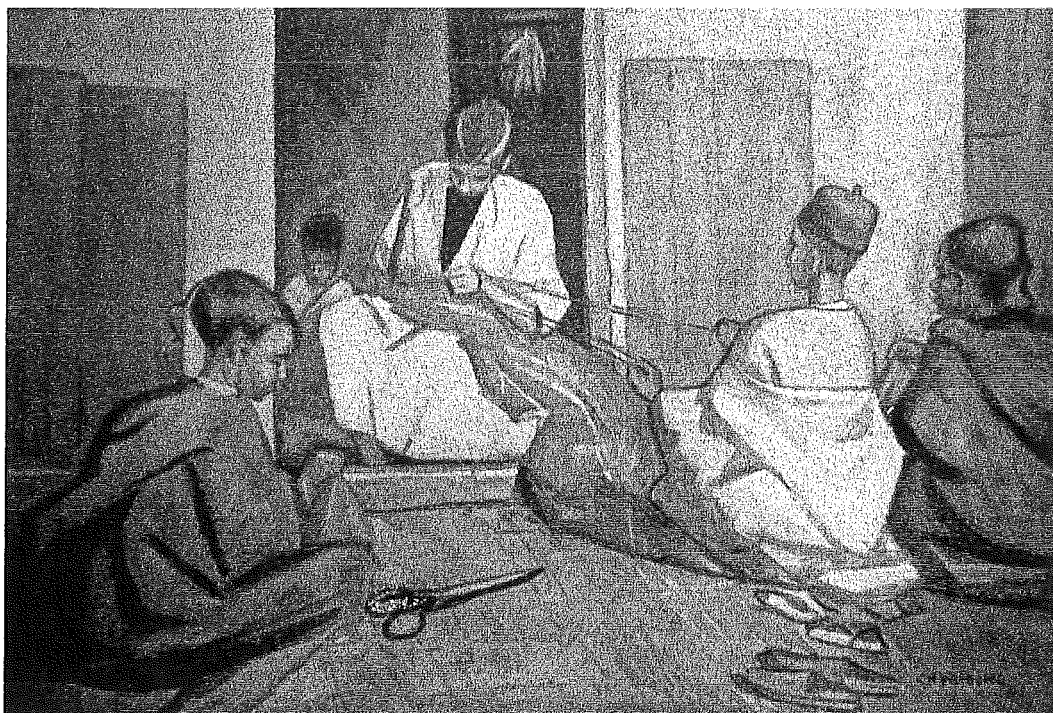
<sup>63</sup>The artistic practice required the artist to remain the subject and the aestheticised other to become the object ; Evelyn Page was a contemporary of Cora's who frequently painted the female nude. Coley, p.44.

for little or nothing, as well as the influence of painters such as Elizabeth Forbes, who painted children and thus may have had an early influence on Cora, it also represented the gendered options for women painters. Women, seeking their own other, whom they could at once dominate within the cultural discourse of the time and in turn paint, sought out the child or the native, and in a different way, nature. While Cora eventually did turn to portraying the New Zealand landscape in her works, as in Mt Egmont 1936 (fig. 8), at this stage she established her dominance and authority over her subject as artist, by painting the (native) child - the Freudian symbol of woman's other; the Lacanian substitute for woman's lack.

Rabat, Tailor Boys (fig. 3) painted in c.1924, offers an example of Cora's work which centred around the life of children. Symbolically, the children in this work were treated in a reasonably stylised and simplified way which proved to universalise the notion of the 'child', even though they were depicted for their cultural difference. None of the boys confront the viewer in this work, and none have individually identifiable features - at best we see the boy on the lower left, heavily outlined, in profile. The individuality of the subjects is unimportant in this work because the subjects are at once transformed into 'significant form' within the picture plane, as well as being used to stand in for the universal child.<sup>64</sup> Because of this, the more obvious interpretation of this work (as a work of social comment) is that all children are equal cross-culturally and therefore we are all one in youth. From this point of view, works of Cora's such as this one, represent her belief in the potential for universal communication in art. Following the theories of Bell and Tolstoy, as have been discussed, Cora saw art as a means to world peace. Her explicit belief in her later years regarding art, was that in taking the art of one nation to another, inter-cultural understanding would result, and thus peace. In this way, these types of watercolours - including Holy Week, Penitente Procession Traversing Street in Seville (fig. 4) - can be seen in terms of an intention to bring the depiction of the exoticised other into contact with British subjects for the betterment of society - albeit a depiction of the other which already had 'white' cultural assumptions embedded in it. This is especially successful in that it does use the child as the vehicle, because during the 1920s more and more

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<sup>64</sup> Presumably with significant form as the goal of the 'modern' painter, the content needed to come from something which was without a meaning - devoid of agency and potential for communication with the viewer, as this would detract from the formal aspects of the image. The native, the child and the woman were appropriate subjects because of this. Bailey Van Hook considers that women were used as content in American paintings from 1876-1914 for similar reasons. See B. Van Hook, Angels of Art : Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914, Pennsylvania, 1996.



(Fig. 3) Rabat (Capital of French Morocco), Tailor Boys c.1924.  
Watercolour,  
Location unknown,

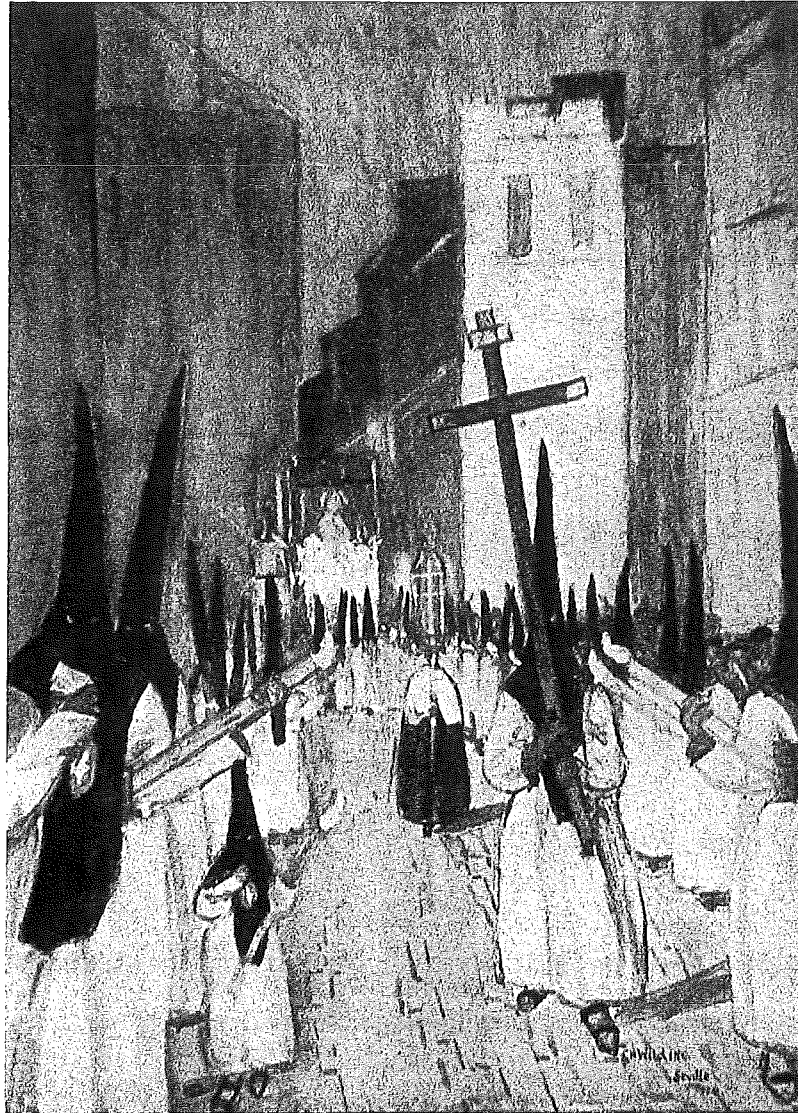
Art in New Zealand, Vol.10 No.1, September 1937, p.28.

attention was being given to the child as an individual with universal, cross-cultural rights.<sup>65</sup> However, it is also possible to see this work as being more overtly political, in that it harbours the possible interpretation as a statement against child labour. A thesis written by Jonathon Smart on social comment in New Zealand within the arts does not consider the presence of works like this to indicate a social conscience amongst women artists - and while discussing artistic intention is always a problematic undertaking, it does seem warranted to consider works like this one, to indicate a sense of social comment (although perhaps not directly about New Zealand).<sup>66</sup> Given that Cora was an activist explicitly working towards greater rights for the child in subsequent years, loosely at least, such an interpretation seems justified.

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<sup>65</sup>The Declaration of Geneva on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924.

<sup>66</sup>See J. R. Smart, 'Art and Social Comment in New Zealand 1930-1982', Masters thesis in Art History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1982.



(Fig. 4) Holy Week, Penitente Procession Traversing Street in Seville, 1924.  
Watercolour,  
Location unknown,

Art in New Zealand, Vol. 10 No. 1, September 1937, p.27.

*Both this watercolour and Rabat (capital of French Morocco) Tailor Boys (fig.3), were exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1927 - although it is unclear at which Paris Salon.*

Very little remains as documentation of Cora's stay in the United States of America, other than her shock at the high cost of living and the extreme heat of the houses.<sup>67</sup> Whatever works may have been produced in America, acquaintances made or exhibitions seen, Cora did make

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<sup>67</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 172 Item 49, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Sicily Nov. 30th [1921], reverse p.3. Canterbury Museum.

enough of an impact to have a show of her own organised before her departure.<sup>68</sup> Fish Stall on the Pier, California (fig. 5) must have been painted during this stay in 1921, which shows a far more descriptive and earlier style of watercolour from that of Rabat, Tailor Boys.<sup>69</sup> What stands out in this work, is the use of light, in that the harshness of the lighting proves to bleach much detail from the image, rather than allowing for a depiction of form. In a way, it seems as though Cora was using light to flatten the pictorial plane and thus modernise her image. The overall effect is a use of light which is reminiscent of an over-exposed photograph. This work however was still largely impressionistic and in subject matter reflected the work of Stanhope Forbes. Cora was to have had an exhibition of sketches in San Francisco, the school of which she was familiar, but was later advised that times were bad and that the exhibition could not be held.<sup>70</sup> Similarly an exhibition planned for Chicago fell through. Whether these disappointments were due to the economic/artistic climate of America at the time or not, Cora left a trail of unfulfilled expectations behind her in the galleries of the world who thought to show her works and then changed their minds.<sup>71</sup>

Once Cora had travelled on to Europe, her progress is easier to document. Whether the traces of her journey have since been lost, or whether the cost of travelling in the United States meant that Cora couldn't afford to keep up correspondence, we have to wait until she was back in Italy to continue her story in late 1921. Unfortunately the correspondence relating to this period, was largely written for her mother and father, and thus was likely to attempt to paint a picture which assured them of the worth of her time abroad to ensure continued support.<sup>72</sup> Because of this, one is possibly left with an inaccurate account of her 'real' feelings

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<sup>68</sup>It is possible that Cora came into contact with the work of Rivera on this trip - ideologically he was of influence to her regarding the social role of art which comes through in her ideas on murals.

<sup>69</sup>Fish Stall on the Pier was bought by the Canterbury Society of Artists in 1971 from Cora's Retrospective Exhibition and was de-comissioned from the CSA collection in 1999.

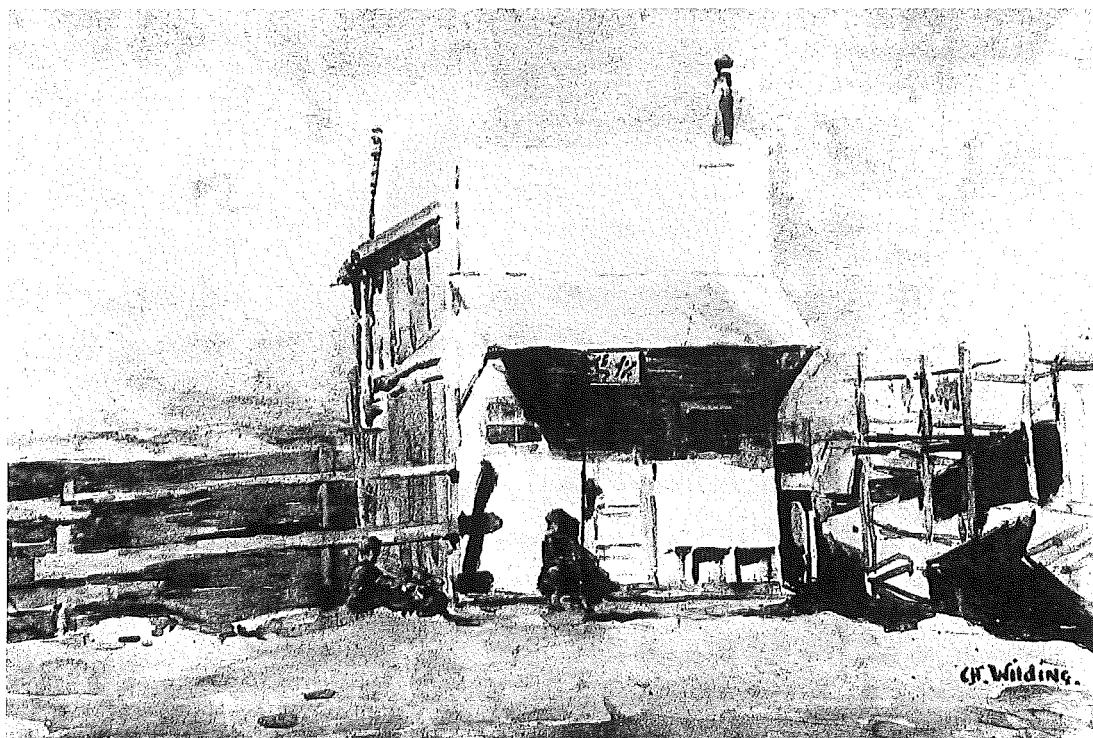
<sup>70</sup>Fish Stall on the Pier may have been one of the works to be exhibited in America, even though its date has been given as 1923 in the Ferner Gallery Catalogue, a year Cora spent travelling through France and on to Morocco - the Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue gives the date as 1921. Ferner Gallery Catalogue 2002 ; Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 172 Item 55, correspondence to Edwyn from Cora, Sicily Jan. 23rd [1922], p.2 Canterbury Museum ; Item 57, correspondence to Father from Cora, Taormina March 2nd [1922] ; Box 37 Folder 174 'Outward Correspondence, September 1922-December 1922' Item 84, correspondence to Father from Cora, 5 Rue des Fuellantines Paris Oct. 31st [1922], p.2.

<sup>71</sup>Other planned exhibitions which fell through at this time were to be held in Sweden, Chicago, and San Francisco in 1922 and at Malaga in 1923.

<sup>72</sup>Unlike many struggling artists, Cora was relatively secure in that her father sent her a semi-regular allowance, for which she felt at once extremely grateful, and mildly guilty.



towards the types of art and artists she met. Furthermore, Cora was a person who believed in thinking only positive thoughts, and thus any grievances she had in relation to family members and her travels are unlikely to have been expressed in any written form. Because of



(Fig. 5) Fish Stall on the Pier, California 1921.

Watercolour 330 x 485mm.

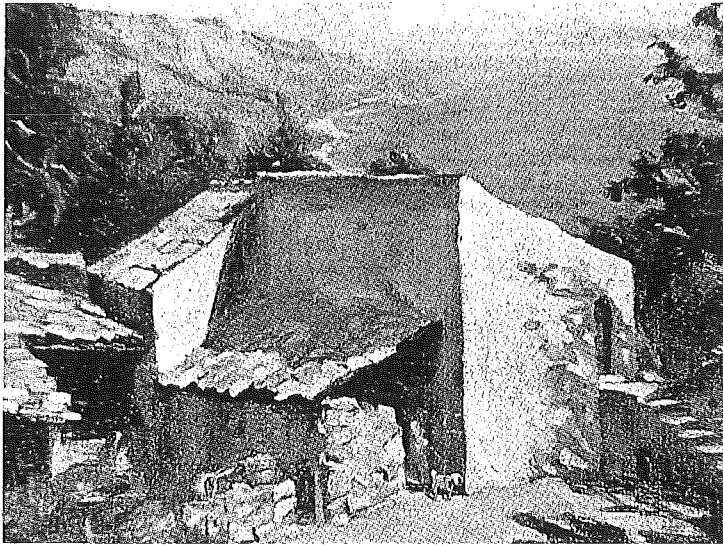
Location unknown; formerly in the collection of the Canterbury Society of the Arts.

'Fish Stall on the Pier, California 1923', Ferner Galleries, Catalogue 2002 : Finest N.Z. Art 1858-2002, p.28.

these points, the portrayal of Cora as an artist abroad, is necessarily incomplete, but while the 'blood, sweat and tears' side of Cora's story may be missing, there is certainly plenty of documentation which remains of her travels.

On Cora's second trip abroad she moved on from America, travelling from Sicily to Italy, Germany, Sweden, France, London, Spain, Morocco, Tangiers, Marakeeth and Mahat and Fey to name a few, painting it seems, all the way. While travelling, she made an effort to stay off the beaten track of the tourists, who she described as being like sheep, in favour of settings





(Fig. 6) Taormina, Sicily, c.1922.  
Oil on canvas board,  
414 x 552mm.  
Robert McDougall Art  
Gallery,  
Presented by Mr E. A. F.  
Wilding, 1951.

J. Coley et.al., White  
Camellias : A Century of  
Women's Artmaking in  
Canterbury, Christchurch,  
1993, p.42.

which allowed for mixing with the locals.<sup>73</sup> This I have already mentioned with regard to the desire to meet the non-white artistic object worthy of painting, but it also represented the desire to incorporate as many influences as possible into her body of works. And of course some of the locals were not 'native', and some of her strongest influences from this time came from other travelling artists. In 1922 she wrote of starting to paint landscapes in oils with the help of a Monsieur Ricard, a small French-man staying at the same lodgings as her.<sup>74</sup> While in Siena a Parisian artist, Mr Bloomfield, helped her with her work, although she felt his work was not very good, and was thus not surprised to find that he took drugs and later, in San Gimignano, two artists, Mr Haynes and Mr Morris taught her how to prepare her canvas and encouraged her to experiment with a palette knife. She wrote of these two men 'They are exceedingly modern, paint with palette knives not brushes and have the utmost horror of making anything the least tiny bit approach beauty.'<sup>75</sup> While she may not have always approved of the work of the artists she met, she certainly accepted their willingness to advise her with open arms. There were many other travelling artists whom she met which may have been influential on her artistic development, as much if not more so than the 'teachers' she

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<sup>73</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 172 Item 62. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid, Item 56, correspondence, Sicily Feb 21st [1922].

<sup>75</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 173 Item 74, correspondence to Mother from Cora, San Gimignano July 28th [1922]. Canterbury Museum.

studied under in the art schools.<sup>76</sup> This of course, means that attributing the development of her 'style' to a 'school' or particular individual's 'influence' reflects nothing more than an arbitrary placing of emphasis within an artistic discourse of dominance.

The quality of the work Cora produced in these years is hard to ascertain with any degree of clarity. Where the works themselves would offer definite insight into the quality of her artistic achievements, for the most part these works remain obscure. Taormina, Sicily (fig.6) is an oil painting produced during this period of innovative experimentation, but it is a rather conservative work, having been compared to the work of Sydney Thompson.<sup>77</sup> I suspect that basing an interpretation of Cora's artistic merit solely on those works that *are* readily available, such as Taormina, Sicily, would be to offer a misleading interpretation of her artistic development. Furthermore, a consideration of such paintings as objects of art now, would fail to acknowledge their relevance as objects of and in relation to, the past. This would require recourse being made to alternative manifestations of the historical past such as exhibition reviews and other documented responses to the works. In this way, while the works themselves are obviously central to a discussion of Cora's artistic ability, I have no qualms about failing to include them as an active presence in this text. I would claim that the discourses produced by the works are as important - or perhaps more important in a consideration of historical artistic worth, than the physical product of paint on canvas alone - as fetishised object, can ever be. However, the written documentation in relation to Cora's works is minimal due to the relative lack of exposure Cora officially achieved as an artist when compared to artists such as say, Rata Lovell-Smith, who has been remembered as a more prominent Canterbury artist than Cora ever has. Although while articles discussing Cora's work in publications such as Art in New Zealand are few in number, these can be complimented by the comparatively rich source of responses to her work documented in the letters Cora wrote home at this time - which are of course tempered in their freedom as already mentioned, by the desire to keep funding-fathers on side.

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<sup>76</sup>Sian Reynolds identified that for Paris at least, the artistic community in the Latin Quarter - where Cora stayed - offered new ideas that were more influential to visiting artists than were the advice of the established heads of the Parisian schools. Reynolds, p.330.

<sup>77</sup>It has been compared to the work of Sydney Thompson in White Camelias. Coley, p.42.

Cora's letters home can be used in an attempt to gain insight into the works produced at this time, and in them, we find a tendency towards a belittling of her own achievements. Cora wrote to her family periodically of the lack of artistic merit she saw in her own works,

There is something very strong and powerful about l. Gimignano and the strength of the grim old towers is very good for me. My colour isn't bad, my composition is quite good, but my sense of form and strength of line and simplicity is what I am going for here as much as possible and what I Lack.<sup>78</sup>

While apparently dismissing artistic ability, this also demonstrates at once both an astute sense of purpose and a keen sense of 'taste' in relation to her drive to succeed, as well as showing that notion of success to be in purely abstract and masculinely modernist terms courtesy of Clive Bell. Her concerns, as represented in the above tract taken from a letter written in 1922, were certainly not for achieving a pleasing likeness of the subject, in fact the actual subject was almost unimportant in relation to what Cora considered to be the markers of successful artistic expression, as it was a sort of significant form that Cora was searching for - none of which is particularly apparent in Taormina, Sicily. This in itself, shows Cora to have been a committed artist, in that she was taking her work seriously and searching for an ultimate truth of form in her art, rather than showing her work to be the hobby of an artistically minded socialite. Although Cora often denied her 'modernness', she was clearly inculturated in the discourse of modernism. What this passage also serves to illuminate, is the perceived lack of ability on Cora's part. This may simply be a case of female false modesty, but it can also be interpreted in terms of a necessarily perfectionist artistic-temperament, or as reflecting a developing artistic style which was unappreciated by peers and resulted in a degree of self criticism. In fact this lack of artistic self-appreciation has a multitude of possible interpretations and it is important to remember that any interpretation taken must be tempered by reference to gender, in that Cora as a woman artist was always in the position of either conforming to, or breaking away from, both the artistic and feminine norm. Thus should Cora have been a perfectionist, the above quotation would reflect this in a self explanatory way were she a man, but that she was a woman, makes a direct interpretation of such a thing problematic. When taken at face value, the above quotation appears to show Cora to have been flat out denying

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<sup>78</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 173 Item 72, correspondence to Father from Cora, July14 [1922]. Canterbury Museum.

the merits of her own work, but when reconsidered with a mind for gendered subjects, she can in fact be seen to be asserting her grasp of colour and composition, and a belief in her potential as an artist of worth. At any rate, a degree of self doubt in an artist is certainly no reflection on the merit of the work produced and thus other references need to be made to substantiate or otherwise, this self-affirmed lack of artistic ability.

Self-effacement continued to come across in the letters sent home, but there were also reports made of the reactions she found others to have had to her works. For the most part, the 'everyday' people she knew thought her works were fine, but Cora sought an authoritative voice of judgement, which she found at the Academie Ranson in France in the winter of 1922/3. This academie was founded by Paul Ranson in 1908 and was one of the more established Parisian schools offering a sound foundation in drawing and sketching for students by way of copying the works of the old masters.<sup>79</sup> Criticisms were given on a weekly basis, by Maurice Denis and an assortment of other accomplished male artists. Before leaving for New Zealand she took the time to see Denis' show, the 'Exposition : Maurice Denis' in May of 1924 in Paris.<sup>80</sup> Responses to Cora's work seem mixed, in the first criticism her watercolours were unappreciated, and again the following week she failed to receive a positive response, while on the 11 Nov, she was given approving criticism and consequently felt that she didn't deserve it.<sup>81</sup> Again perhaps false-modesty, or perhaps having been told her works were lacking previously she now believed they were. In February 1923 Cora moved to the Academie Moderne for a month, where criticisms were given weekly by Othon Friesz - a fauvist painter and friend of Raoul Dufy. The Academie Moderne was a far more avant-garde school than those Cora had previously attended.<sup>82</sup> Nothing remains describing the responses of Friesz to Cora's work, but they too were likely to be negative as on the 12 February Cora wrote to her Mother, somewhat disheartened, 'Really art is an awfully discouraging sort of business, such an enormous number of people wasting their lives trying to paint and then at the end of their life - have achieved nothing.' The general response amongst the official Parisian art-circles seems to have been a lack in appreciation towards Cora's developments, presumably simply because as she herself wrote on many occasions, she was not very modern.

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<sup>79</sup>Perkins, p.11.

<sup>80</sup>Archive 1/83A, [Catalogue] 'Exposition : Maurice Denis'. Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

<sup>81</sup>Which is not to overlook the fact that the quality of her work may have been uneven.

<sup>82</sup>Perkins, pp.12-13.

While Cora obviously failed to replicate the achievements of New Zealand born artists like Frances Hodgkins while she was abroad, this does not necessarily mean that she was not an accomplished artist in her own right. In some ways, it is easy to claim Cora as a daughter of the modernist movement within the arts, while in others it appears that she was only ever on the doorstep of modernism and never let herself in. While overseas, as has already been mentioned, Cora experimented widely with new techniques such as painting with a palette knife and was eager to learn and see what the 'new' art was about. While in Paris in 1923, she met up with Raoul Dufy and spent some time working with him, but still responded in correspondence that he was far too modern for her to understand. There is a disparity here, between what Cora wrote in her letters and what appears to have been happening at the time. Cora was trying to simplify her works, experimented with new techniques, and adopted and adapted the modernist ideology and in effect created albeit slowly, her own type of modernism, and yet she often claimed herself thoroughly un-modern. In November 1922 Cora wrote from Paris,

Don't be afraid dear old Mother that I shall become too modern. I'm aiming to understand the aim of the modern art movement and am studying and reading but I adopt nothing until I have reasoned and comprehend[sic] it, and then accept it, and I certainly can not comprehend most of the modern work though I am sure it will have a very healthy influence eventually though so many of its manifestations are the reverse of healthy sanity<sup>83</sup>

On 6 December of the same year she wrote of her work 'I try everything, but am afraid that I'm very conservative.'<sup>84</sup> These comments are again prone to the interpretive confusion present in the writings of a daughter, and of a woman artist. It seems that while Cora's family were supportive of her career as an artist, they were reluctant to accept the serious artistic implications of modernism, unsurprising considering that artists themselves had to leave New Zealand to learn about them. But this does go part way in explaining Cora's descriptions of herself as conservative and not-modern. Cora's brother Edwyn failed to appreciate the modernist aesthetic, and on seeing some of Cora's work from her time abroad, exclaimed that

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<sup>83</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder174 Item 87, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Nov. 24th [1922]. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid, Item 89, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Sunday Dec. 6th [1922].

he hoped she stopped experimenting in such a way immediately and on another occasion asserted that he did not like modern works and hoped that Cora did not either.<sup>85</sup> Thus a reticence in proclaiming one's alignment with modernism on the part of Cora can be understood when it is considered who she was writing to and under what circumstances.<sup>86</sup> While she was reticent in claiming modernism for herself in correspondence, the same factors, a lack in family support and a lack in achieving high modernist standards will have been considerations to the degree of modernism which she did achieve in her works. This construction allows for an understanding of Cora which places her in a brave and defiant position in that she did continue to seek out new artistic experiences, knowing that her family at home would be hard pressed to understand her work, and at the same time continually finding herself to come up short when faced with Parisian ideals of high modernism.

Even while in Paris in the Winter of 1922/3, attending modern schools, Cora still found herself in the role of distanced observer. She wrote,

It is amusing looking at the people in the studio, nearly all the women are smoking and only a few of the men ... So many of the women have bobbed hair and how I envy them. What would you and Mother say if I bobbed mine? It would be an enormous saving of time and trouble. I am not going to do it though.<sup>87</sup>

Which certainly gives the impression of one who watches rather than engages, in the lifestyle at least. It is the 'modern' look of the women that Cora envied and was also amused by. Cora of course could have adopted these visual traits, but presumably, while smoking was out of the question due to health considerations, the hair style would have demarcated her as a threat to social norms, and this Cora was not willing to do. At this stage Cora herself wore a full-length fur-coat everyday (fig.7), finding it a bit awkward to paint with oils in but wearing it nonetheless, showing that in its own way, image mattered to her too - a more established type of female image. Although the feminist context for both Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League

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<sup>85</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 170 Item 29, correspondence to Cora from Edwyn, 8/11/22. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>86</sup>The painting Taormina, Sicily (fig. 6) was donated to the McDougall Art Gallery by Edwyn, and in light of his comments regarding her experimentation, it is likely that this work is a rather tame example of her work from the period and was perhaps either given to him, or painted explicitly for him, with this in mind - and this, is the work we have ended up remembering her for, located as it is, in a public collection.

<sup>87</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 File 174 Item 84. Canterbury Museum.

will be established in a later section, Cora's position as a woman artist located in a discourse of 'first wave feminism' saw her in a contradictory position. She believed it was her right as a woman to fulfil her own potentials and ambitions, but she also believed that women had responsibilities as citizens.<sup>88</sup> In a way, for women like Cora, who already had the vote in their own country, respectability for women was of the utmost importance. Ideologically, Cora



(Fig. 7) 'On Golf Links above Menaggio, April 9th '23; Mrs Seager and Cora [Wilding]'

*Presumably the fur coat Cora wears in this photo is the coat sent to her by her mother which she painted in. (Cora is on left).*

Wilding Collection,  
Canterbury Museum.  
Ref : 17173.

could not take on the characteristics of these modern women artists, because she was a woman who shared the beliefs of many first wave feminists which valued women's role in terms of a gendered, respectable and conservative citizen.<sup>89</sup>

Given that modernism itself was a discourse that prioritised male experience and spoke with a masculine tongue, it is not surprising that Cora found high modernism hard to understand and was tentative in finding a niche with which to align herself. This also goes part way in explaining why her criticisms often proved disheartening, in that she was always ultimately painting as a woman, when to succeed as a modernist the discourse required that she be a man.

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<sup>88</sup>This is one of the 'feminist paradoxes', pertaining to the rights of the individual versus the rights of the group. See Nolan, pp.34-5.

<sup>89</sup>On the idea of citizenship feminism, see Lake, p.7, p.51 ; J. Rendall, 'Citizenship, Culture and Civilisation : The Language of British Suffragists, 1866-1874' in Daley and Nolan eds. Suffrage and Beyond : International Feminist Perspectives, pp.127-150.

Although women artists were being successfully modern at this time - Frances Hodgkins being one example and Cora's friend Shelby Shackleton being another. The point is, that while Cora could have fully embraced a visual signifier of the modern, she could have cut her hair short and painted in increasing degrees of abstraction, she chose not to. This however, does not mean that she was not 'modern', nor that she was not progressing with her works despite her reluctance to claim their worth. What it does mean, is that she only accepted the manifestations of modernism which fit with her understanding of the world and women's role within it, one which was necessarily an understanding tainted with a New Zealand up-bringing, and flavoured by the simple fact that she was a woman. If then, high modernism was a masculine practice, Cora worked within a feminised version of this discourse, precisely because she did filter its motives through her gendered perception of the world, rather than adopting its manifesto unchanged. From this point of view, Cora's works were not products of 'high modernism', but were manifestations of the combination of discourses present in Cora's position as tourist, woman, and artist.

While Cora was, it seems, unwilling - or perhaps unable - to adopt modernism on its own terms, she was certainly not willing to adopt the status quo of the position of women either, both of which were indicative of Cora's position within discourses of 'first wave feminism'. In this we probably see the imprint of Cora's mother's beliefs about the position of women in society, as well as that of the other intellectual elite in Christchurch from her youth which had seen women gain the vote in New Zealand 5 years after her birth. However while Cora's mother had been supportive of women's enfranchisement even from before the family moved to New Zealand, she was a product of her time, and saw the role of women primarily in the home as social gem.<sup>90</sup> Because the role of women within New Zealand society was so narrow, even though women were increasingly gaining equality in opportunities for education and other societal structures, and in theory women were free to choose a career over marriage, social responsibilities and family needs invariably sucked women artists back into the fold of the family upon their return from an art training overseas - in many ways a return to New Zealand was a thoroughly disempowering affair, especially for women artists. While Cora was content to return to '... quiet honest clean little New Zealand', believing that the Maori and the landscape would make for some fine subjects, she was unwilling to give up her newly

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<sup>90</sup>S. A. Richardson, p.15.



found freedom from the role of daughter to do so.<sup>91</sup> In July of 1922 Cora wrote to her Father 'I don't want to fritter my life away doing social things and society and Mother mustn't mind my not wanting to do them.'<sup>92</sup> In August 1923, she wrote to her Mother, 'That is my great fear. That I have become very selfish since I have been painting and travelling about.'<sup>93</sup> And then again in September she wrote to her Father 'I am afraid taking painting up seriously has absolutely finished any desire for much stupid society sort of life for me and I do hope you won't find me a very disappointing sort of daughter to have'.<sup>94</sup> During this time away from New Zealand she also began to harden her beliefs about the role of women, deciding that marriage was not necessary, so long as the woman in question kept herself busy and could be self-supporting in whatever it was that she was doing.<sup>95</sup> Cora appears to have been placing herself within the role of the New Woman, free not to marry, but a New Woman tempered by her obligation to remain a productive member of society. Cora then, had justified in her own mind her decision to be a painter, in that it was what she needed to do to be fulfilled as an individual, but still expressed concern over the effect her decision would have on her wider family.

Near the end of 1923, Cora began to feel the pull of the land of her birth. She wrote to her brother Edwyn that she felt she had made a bad decision by not returning home the previous year, a feeling which had been brought to a head by her father having had a serious operation in her absence which Cora was obviously unable to be of any help with. Cora began to seriously feel that she was wasting the family money while at the same time letting the family down by not succeeding to the degree that she and they would have liked. An exhibition was organised for the Graham Gallery in London for May 1924, and Cora decided that should she fail to make a success of this venture, she 'certainly wont attempt anything else in regard to

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<sup>91</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 File 174 Item 90, correspondence to Father from Cora, Sunday Dec. 20th [1922], p.2. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>92</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 173 Item 72. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>93</sup>Wilding family : ARC1989.124 Box 38 Folder 175 Item 103, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Hotel Allantique Concarneau August 10th [1923]. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., Item 107, correspondence to Mother from Cora, Pension Carmen de La Camida Granada Sept. 30th 1923.

<sup>95</sup>Cora wrote in a letter to her father, 'The older I get the stronger I am on the subject of women having work - regular hard work about which they are keen. A woman can be happy, if she is not married, under any other circumstances.' Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 37 Folder 173 Item 67, correspondence to Father from Cora, May 23rd [1922], p.3. Canterbury Museum.

throwing[sic] away money and publishing a book.<sup>96</sup> The book was to have been a narrative describing her travels and a draft of parts of it remains in the Macmillan Brown collection.<sup>97</sup> It is unclear why the work was not published; possibly Cora herself found she did not have the time or inclination to finish it on her return to New Zealand. The exhibition held in London appears to have been satisfactory, she made £50 and the reviews in the papers were positive. The work was described as displaying 'A tendency to follow in the footsteps of the Modern School but not to such an extent as to require any special training to appreciate the work.'<sup>98</sup> Clearly the works in this exhibition indicated her conservative approach towards high modernism. The review praised her 'water effects' and commented that 'In Morocco the glaring lights and dark shadows seem to have suited her style...'<sup>99</sup> The London Morning Post reported that 'Miss Wilding visualises her subjects with rapid glances and puts down her impression in broad, vigorous washes. At her best she convincingly suggests the character of what she has seen'.<sup>100</sup> Another report described her work as being '...remarkably pleasant. She has a delicate touch and can be most decorative. She is never too slight and wishywashy'.<sup>101</sup> Such a description obviously reflected the gendered ideal of art produced by women at this time in that Cora's work was described as delicate and decorative - appropriate stylistic components for a woman painter, while it was also considered to not be slight or wishywashy where such qualities would surely have indicated the poorness of the weaker sex as painters. Cora's work then, at this London exhibition, showed her to be an accomplished *woman* painter.

Cora's return to New Zealand was probably indicative of a combination of influences. Cora was increasingly becoming aware of her burden on the family's finances and finding herself to be increasingly learning more from sketching alone, than attending the schools abroad. With

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<sup>96</sup>Cora also had a work shown in 1924 at the Salon De Peinture. Archive 1/83A: [catalogue] 'Salon De Peinture'. Robert McDougall Art Gallery

<sup>97</sup>Cora Wilding papers [4.4] [box 1] [draft]. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>98</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box1] [review] May 29 1924. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>MS-PAPERS-6412-09 'Notes on Rita Angus and the growth of a national identity', Kirker Anne : Research Papers for New Zealand Women Artists: notes on Cora Hilda Blanche Wilding 1888-1982 [Catalogue] Exhibition of Sketches. Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid. From the London 'Daily Sketch' ; The 'London Times' described the works as being '... on the whole well composed, and they have a certain workmanlike boldness of execution which inspires confidence in Miss Wilding's ability to sum up the general character of a place.' Ibid.

Cora's opinion about single women hinging on the idea that they needed to be self-sufficient and productive members of the community, her own ideology required her to make some kind of change in her living circumstances. While Cora could have attempted making a living as a teacher, she appears to have not considered this a viable option, perhaps because of a lack of faith in her own abilities. Also added to this, was the constant feeling of coming up short when she compared herself to 'established' artists, and when faced with the ideals of modernism. While these are all likely to be contributing factors to Cora's decision to return to New Zealand by 1925, it is just as likely that she simply felt her time abroad was over, that she was getting bored with the life-style of the travelling artist and missed her family (her brother had fallen in love and married while she was away, and her parents' state of health was dubious) - she did after all turn 37 in 1925, and her age itself may have been a contributing factor in her return to New Zealand.

While this return to New Zealand would have again seen her caught up in familial demands, Cora still continued to paint diligently. In 1925 Cora had an exhibition, probably held at the Canterbury Society of Arts gallery, from which she made £120 - indicating that there was some interest in her work in New Zealand, although this figure also probably reflected the conservative nature of the works she chose to exhibit.<sup>102</sup> The works Cora exhibited four years later, in 1929, were described in Art in New Zealand in terms of displaying 'Strength of colour and vigorous understanding of the rhythm... Her pictures are full of light and bracing air, and are always composed with a sense of fitness to subject.'<sup>103</sup> These do appear to be positive descriptions of Cora's work, but her 'Dagaba and Buddhist Priests' is criticised for a weakness in drawing. Progressively however, mention made of Cora in this art journal tended toward a recognition of her in terms of her 'work for the health of children through the Sunlight League'.<sup>104</sup> Rather than criticising the works in the exhibition at Fisher's Gallery in 1937, the focus was clearly placed on Cora's alternative role within the community as health activist, stating that the funds raised were intended for Spanish Refugee Children. Cora's recognised identity was as a health activist who painted water-colours rather than as an artist in her own right. The article did conclude however, that 'Miss Wilding is very successful in her

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<sup>102</sup> Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162 Item 1, entry for December 1925. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>103</sup> 'Art Notes', Art in New Zealand, Vol.2 No.6, December 1929, p.142.

<sup>104</sup> 'Art Notes', Art in New Zealand, Vol.10 No.1, September 1937, p.50.

free broad use of water-colour', perhaps to reassure the potential buyer that his or her purchase would not be totally in the name of charity.<sup>105</sup>

Although Cora did continue to travel around New Zealand and paint - from her return in 1925 until the 1960s by which time she was settled in Kaikoura - the most interesting involvement which she had from this period in relation to the Christchurch art scene, was her involvement with what was called The Group. The Group was made up of ex-Canterbury College School of Art students, including Cora Wilding, who found the annual Society of Arts exhibitions to be too restrictive in their selection procedures, and wished to form a loose knit association of like-minded artists offering a supportive forum for experimentation. What is in fact notable about The Group is its early female membership - 6 out of the 8 original members were women, which indicates the richness of women's productivity in these years.<sup>106</sup> The Group's very existence, as an alternative body to the established Society of Arts, also shows that the cultural context of Christchurch itself had changed little while Cora was abroad. There was now enough of a sense of community amongst some of the artists, and a shared sense of purpose which was able to lead to a 'break-away' group, but essentially The Group's existence demonstrates the wider Christchurch community's tendency towards not supporting innovation within the arts. Cora showed some of her works at the first Group Show at the members' Cashel Street Studio in 1927 and continued to show with the Group in the years 1929, 1935-38 and 1943-47.<sup>107</sup> Cora exhibited sporadically in the following years, and although its existence is outside the scope of this project, she also formed the Kaikoura Art Group and continued exhibiting with them into the 1960s.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid. ; Cora's retrospective exhibition held at the CSA Gallery in 1971, was reviewed in Newspapers, one such review read 'Miss Wilding's oil paintings are perhaps less consistent than her water-colours, often appearing much darker in tone and more static by contrast, although No.23, "Mount Egmont", suffers from neither of these problems.', continuing 'Having very strong dark-light passages with broad areas of colour playing across trees and undergrowth, "Mount Egmont" is a penetrating study of landscape stripped of unnecessary detail.' It is unlikely that this 'Mt Egmont' is 'Mount Egmont 1936' as reproduced in this thesis. Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 2] [newspaper cutting] 'Retrospective Exhibition by Cora Wilding'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>106</sup>The other original members were Margaret Anderson, William Baverstock, Viola Macmillan Brown, Ngaio Marsh, W.H. Montgomery, Evelyn Page and Edith Wall.

<sup>107</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 35 Folder 162 Item 1, entry for Aug. 3-20 1927. Canterbury Museum ; J. A. Catchpole, 'The Group', Masters thesis in Art History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1984, p.164.

What is interesting as far as discussions of The Group are concerned, is that in some texts Cora's involvement with the other founding artists is overlooked. It is unclear exactly how much active involvement Cora had with these other artists but she was certainly one of the founding members. Julie Catchpole's thesis identified only seven founding members for the Group, perhaps mistakenly quoting from the article on the 1945 Group in Art in New Zealand which advised its audience of seven founding members - needless to say the omitted artist was Cora.<sup>108</sup> The later work Women Together similarly identified four founding women members of the Group where Cora was the omitted fifth.<sup>109</sup> The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography did identify Cora as a founding member but other works, like White Cameliass, appear to have been unsure.<sup>110</sup>

In this way Cora has been left to sit on the artistic side-lines of depictions of New Zealand art history. Cora has been given attention as an artist of passing merit up to the late 1920s in White Cameliass; Catchpole's thesis failed to discuss Cora and her involvement with The Group adequately; Rebecca Perkins' 'A Dictionary of Foreign Women Artists in Paris 1920-1930' failed to include an entry on Cora although she did spend the winter of 1922/3 in Paris, and of course, as feminist art historians will all agree, Cora has been left out of artistic narratives prior to works such as the aforementioned attempts at re-claiming a woman's artistic past, because Cora *was* a woman. But such excuses only go so far, when feminist works of re-construction have also failed to give her artistic credibility. As I proposed at the outset of this discussion, ideological categories which define Art and Health in opposing manners are partly to blame, but Cora was an artist for twenty years prior to her taking on the mixed role. Does this count for nothing? Perhaps then, Cora simply wasn't engaged with the artistic community in a way which saw her working with 'mainstream' ideas. Perhaps the works Cora produced were themselves on the fringe of the art historical canon - in a conservative rather than an avant-garde way, and thus her lack of representation in authoritative texts is self-explanatory. But then again perhaps not.

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<sup>108</sup>'The 1945 Group, Christchurch', Art in New Zealand, Vol.17 No.6, Serial No.70, Jan-Feb 1946, pp.22-27.

<sup>109</sup>A. Else, 'Organisations in the Art and Crafts' in A. Else ed., Women Together : A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand : Nga Ropu Wahine o te Motu, Wellington, 1993, pp.447-457, p.450.

<sup>110</sup>The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: vol.4 1921-1940, Auckland, 1998, p.565 ; Coley, p.42.

The major artistic narrative which came through for the first half of the century in New Zealand based itself in ideals of nationalism and a national identity within the arts. This was topical in the 1930s in both art and literary circles and manifested itself in a concern with regionalism and finding a way of representing the New Zealand light. Landscape painting was centred in accounts of nationalism within the arts, conflating the ideological construct of land with identity in a post-war narrative which saw an assertion of 'belonging' at its core.<sup>111</sup> The New Zealand landscape itself was a unique factor in the experience of inhabiting New Zealand, but the New Zealand light was what was focused on at this stage in ideological developments of nationhood. Barbara Bolt in her article 'Shedding Light for the Matter', has drawn attention to Australian lighting conditions, in a way perpetuating the myth of the uniqueness of Antipodean light, by having described the art produced by Aboriginal Australians to be at once determined by the land, and a by-product of the 'glare' of the Australian sun. She has claimed that the glare made bodies walk facing the ground which in turn meant that Aboriginal Australian landscape paintings were *of* the land, rather than a perspectival interpretation of land via light and a horizon-line.<sup>112</sup> In this very simple way, light can be understood to affect the experience of living in a particular land and moreover, is a subjective experience.

Light has of course long been a focus in theories of aesthetics. In 1914 Florensky considered beauty to equal 'intelligent light', writing 'Light ... is beautiful beyond all fragmentation, beyond all form; it is beautiful in itself and through itself makes beautiful all that appears', and 'To contemplate the object is also to contemplate the light in which it appears...' <sup>113</sup> It is this type of understanding of light and beauty which has allowed for a focus on landscape painting in a discourse of nationalism.<sup>114</sup> This type of interpretation regarding the historical focus on light, also throws illumination on Cora's burgeoning ideas on heliotherapy in that it allowed for them to be seen in terms of a move to unite bodies and land in an attempt to validate land-claims in the face of looming invasion. Thus bodies and hills experienced the sun in the

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<sup>111</sup>On Canterbury's use of the land for constructions of identity see J. Cookson, 'Pilgrims' Progress - Image, Identity and Myth in Christchurch' in J. Cookson and G. Dunstall eds., Southern Capital : Christchurch : Towards a City Biography, Christchurch, 2000, pp.13-40, p.25.

<sup>112</sup>See B. Bolt, 'Shedding Light for the Matter', Hypatia, Vol.15 No.2, Spring 2000, pp.202-216, p.209.

<sup>113</sup>P. Florensky, The Foundation of Truth, 1914, as quoted in Tolstoy, p.xix.

<sup>114</sup>The late 1800s, especially in Paris, had seen a turn to the shadow as the means to artistic 'truth', see N. Forgiione, 'The Shadow Only' : Shadow and Silhouette in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris', The Art Bulletin, Vol.LXXXI No.3, Sept. 1999, pp.490-512.

same way, and if the lighting was unique then the body and the land would become ideologically joined in a unique experience of being of New Zealand. Inter-war discourses then, manifested themselves within the arts with an explicit focus on the New Zealand landscape as iconic signifier of New Zealand identity via the light which shone on it. This was advanced by painters like Christopher Perkins and writers like A.R.D. Fairburn then, and has been encouraged as an ideal for the past in works such as Brown's New Zealand Painting 1920-1940 in more recent years.

The myth of the New Zealand landscape was firmly established in inter-war narratives and was carried on in the mythologising of New Zealand's artistic past in a fashion which proved to disinherit many New Zealand women painters of their histories. Women often painted flowers or portraits, from the relative safety of the private sphere, whereas the painting of landscapes required travel, often to remote locations. While this narrative has worked to exclude some women artists from the annals of the past, belittling their work as it failed to engage with what has been considered the master narrative of the time, it seems only partly relevant to a discussion of why Cora has been overlooked.

Whereas painters like Daisy Osborn (1888-1957) caught up the rear of the traditionalists with her flower paintings and thus saw herself firmly embedded in a discourse which celebrated 'traditional' works and the 'feminine' arts, Cora was an artist - of the same age as Osborn - who blended with the 'modern' artists of the New Zealand landscape myth seamlessly. And unlike Mina Arndt and Edith Collier, who lived in areas which had even less artistic backing than Christchurch for the experimental painter, Cora was right in the most nurturing environment in New Zealand of the time. The Group was afterall - especially in its early years - a predominantly women artists' support group and moreover Cora's oeuvre appears to show her to have been producing artistically sound paintings. Cora explicitly dealt with lighting in a number of her early works, which resulted in her style being linked to that of Sydney Thompson (1877-1973). Thompson on the other hand, had also been largely overlooked as being a key-player in the development of New Zealand art because he was himself outside the landscape myth. Thompson, while remaining closely associated with New Zealand when compared to other successful artists of the time, like Hodgkins, painted in a way which

reflected more the romantic lighting conditions of the Northern Hemisphere than what was considered to be the striking and brilliant light of New Zealand.<sup>115</sup> His subject matter largely consisted of depictions of village life featuring figure compositions in groups or in isolation. Perhaps this association with Thompson, stylistically, has worked to edge Cora away from a position in the mythical master-narrative of the landscape tradition. This seems largely unlikely however, because Cora was primarily a recognised landscape painter and was also interested in dealing with specifically New Zealand lighting conditions.<sup>116</sup> In later works, Cora used light as a way of flattening the picture plane and 'burning out' details which resulted in a simplification and modernisation of the painted image. Her later oils of New Zealand landscapes, while still retaining a certain use of paint reminiscent of Sydney Thompson and thus Van der Velden (under whom Thompson studied), plainly fit into the genre of work being produced at the time. See for example Mt Egmont 1936 (fig.8), and to a lesser degree Franz Josef (fig.9), both reproduced in this thesis. Given that Cora was a New Zealand artist who was interested in New Zealand light and painted landscapes in a progressively (although conservatively) modern style, why then, has she been left outside of the landscape narrative?

The nationalist movement within the arts, according to Lisa Beaven, was about *man's* relationship with his environs and I would venture to ask the question where did this leave women?<sup>117</sup> If part of the importance of the landscape myth was that the artist created a specific type of New Zealand modernism which reflected his own experience of living and seeing in a specific place, then surely that would mean that even within the ideal, women would be creating a different type of modernism to men, because they had a different experience of living and seeing in a land from that of their male counterparts. Logically, while traditionally the landscape myth has involved men writing about men, women, as artists in the past, were engaged with it and in turn produced works which were a part of it.<sup>118</sup> According to Beaven,

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<sup>115</sup>Leonard Booth claimed 'Sydney Thompson is not a painter of New Zealand subjects. He is a French painter of French subjects.' - quoted in King, Sydney Lough Thompson : At Home and Abroad, p.75.

<sup>116</sup>Miss Cora Wilding, who is well known for her landscapes... 'Art notes', Art in New Zealand, Vol.3 No.9, Sept. 1930, p.70 ; It is worth noting however, that it appears from at least some of the exhibition catalogues which survive, especially for the New Zealand Society of Artists exhibitions, that Cora was exhibiting more of her works from her time abroad than she was from her time in New Zealand, and this may have had some effect on how the public saw her regarding the landscape myth.

<sup>117</sup>L. Beaven, 'Doris Lusk : Attitudes to the land 1934-84', Masters thesis in Art History, Canterbury University, Christchurch, 1988, pp.88-9.

<sup>118</sup>Rachel Jones has discussed 'Expressionism' as having a different meaning for the woman artist (poet). She wrote '... Expressionism functions differently for those who write from the side of woman, the side of the



an expression of alienation from the land was important, which emphasised the 'transitory nature of human presence in the landscape'.<sup>119</sup> Was this a woman's experience of the landscape? Cora appears to have preferred to paint the New Zealand landscape as a natural beauty offering an infinite array of shapes and patterns, symbolising more a nurturing and inviting place of permanent freedom than an alienating and barren terrain.<sup>120</sup> This may represent her idiosyncratic relationship to the land, but it may also indicate that women saw the land differently to men.<sup>121</sup> Beaven appears to have been aware of this when she claimed that for Lusk's landscapes the *place* was important, where details were included in images to acknowledge their specificity, but in the works of Colin McCahon, conversely, the land was used primarily as a symbol - 'a symbol of religious significance'.<sup>122</sup> She did not go on to draw a general conclusion from her specific example of Lusk that women worked within the landscape ideal differently to the way men did, but I would tentatively say that such a conclusion is warranted.

What I am identifying here, is the existence of a group of ideas which surrounded the arts in the first half of the twentieth century, which prioritised landscapes painted in a 'national' and modern style, and which was adopted by men and women in different ways. Within the abstract parameters of the landscape ideal, logically, both gendered expressions of nationalism via landscape are valid. Historically however, it is the male version of the myth that has been celebrated at the expense of what appears to have been a rich undergrowth of work created by women artists.<sup>123</sup> While some works produced by women have entered the canon because they can be seen to be part of the masculine understanding of the land, others, like those

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'other' and the 'object'.' Jones, p.139.

<sup>119</sup>Beaven, p.17.

<sup>120</sup>It was considered that 'In Miss Macmillan Brown's Landscapes nature always seems to be holding her breath for fear man should discover her and turn her to commercial ends.' MS-PAPERS-6412-09 'Notes on The Group'. Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>121</sup>This may also indicate, as I discussed earlier, a preference or at least a tendency for women to bring the ideals of decadence into the twentieth century rather than directly engaging with high modernism; King claimed the land was important to Margaret Stoddart's work as she painted at a time when colonisation meant a changing and evolving landscape. King, p.25.

<sup>122</sup>Beaven, p.98, p.95.

<sup>123</sup>Other women landscape painters in Canterbury included Rata Lovell-Smith, Grace Butler, and Margaret Stoddart.



(Fig. 8) Mount Egmont 1936 ,1936.

Oil,  
Collection of the Christchurch Polytechnic.

*Formerly known as 'Mount Egmont', and 'Path through the Bush'.*

painted by Cora Wilding, have been overlooked.<sup>124</sup> Subsequently the whole idea of ideals like the landscape myth has been questioned by feminists who would see the myth as a purely masculine fiction enacted in the name of an androcentric nationalist discourse. These types of ideas would see the myth as part of a discourse which wished to privilege male experience at

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<sup>124</sup>Rita Angus' and Doris Lusk's work is accepted as part of the landscape myth because the women are seen almost as honorary men - their images reflecting a masculine understanding of the land.

the expense of women painters who were working in water-colours, painting flowers or portraits, or those women artists who settled for weekend sketching and embroidery. What these types of ideas can do, is to not only undermine the authority of the landscape myth, but



(Fig. 9)  
Cora Wilding with Franz Josef 1929.  
Oil, location unknown.

*This photograph was probably taken at the hanging of Cora's retrospective exhibition in 1971.*

Fig. 14 'Cora with 'Franz Josef'  
Courtesy YHANZ', E. Mathews, Cora : A Wilding Seed, Cheviot, 1998.

if they are not handled cautiously, can also work to discredit the experiences of women painters working under the same governing ideal of modern nationalism as were their male counterparts. In this way, these women were not given the same attention as men in the past simply because they were not men, and in the present there is a risk that they will again be overlooked because there is a dislike for meta-narratives in some contemporary thought which would prefer to not see the landscape myth as being central to the lives of women painters too. Thus although Cora was painting landscapes, in a conservatively modern style comparable to the work of Doris Lusk and Rita Angus (in the 1930s at least,) she has failed to feature in historical narratives because the kinds of narratives which would include her are not being written.

Of course the argument remains that Cora has been side-lined in the history of New Zealand art because she simply was not an important figure. But importance, of course, is a relative term. The fact remains that to include her in the traditional art historical canon as an artist of esteem, she needs to be part of a line of descent in a master narrative. Artists are considered to require a chain of influence to establish the existence of artistic genius (itself a gendered term)

but this itself in many ways has precluded women from being artists of worth, because they were often excluded from public roles of influence.<sup>125</sup> If a woman was not being instated as a teacher in an art school, then she was blocked from influencing students in this openly recognised way.<sup>126</sup> Similarly if women were not being written about in exhibition reviews, then gallery attenders and students of art were not encouraged to take them seriously and thus their influence was again lessened.<sup>127</sup> Cora neither taught, nor had reviewers encourage students and the public to admire her work. Because the idea of genius is at once ideologically masculine and in actuality out of the reach of women artists in many contexts, it becomes apparent that identifying a path of artistic genius is an inappropriate way of determining artistic influence and consequent importance for women artists, including Cora Wilding.

The very idea of artistic genius then, is gendered, and unarguably this is a hurdle in the path of any woman artist, including Cora. It is not enough however to merely identify the presence of such a gendered obstacle and to call Cora a failed artist because all women are ideologically incapable of creativity within artistic discourses and that this in turn became the lived truth of women artists in the past - this is not enough. What is required, to re-instate women as agents in the past, is to look at the ways in which women artists *were* able to succeed in spite of this monolithic oppression, as well as how they have failed to overcome it. I consider that to do justice to women in the past it is necessary to look also for activities beyond the strictly defined areas considered to indicate 'worth' within the arts - even to look beyond what has been considered to constitute 'art' in its traditional sense. Cora did not teach painting and thus her influence on that front was limited, but she was a member - an older member - of The Group and it is hard to ascertain what kind of an influence she had on those artists.<sup>128</sup> Evelyn Page, a

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<sup>125</sup>For inclusion in the art historical canon an artist requires innovation and influence. N. Salomon, 'The Venus Pudica : Uncovering Art History's 'Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees', in G. Pollock ed., Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts : Feminist Readings, London, 1996, pp.69-87, p.70 ; Battersby, p.125.

<sup>126</sup>Although women did teach during the first half of the Twentieth Century, Frances Hodgkins and Elizabeth Forbes being two obvious examples.

<sup>127</sup>Professor James Shelley was one of the main Christchurch art critics of the early decades of the Twentieth Century and it has been noted that at times he had a condescending attitude towards women artists. Kirker, p.30.

<sup>128</sup>Cora may have been excluded from much of the historical narrative explicitly because she *was* an older member of The Group and because of this she may have been considered less than progressive/newsworthy as an individual - a review of The 1935 Group show claims her to belong to an 'older school of New Zealand water-colour painters' which also identifies her uneasy position historically, falling between the old and the new art, but not quite belonging to either. MS-PAPERS-6412-09 'Notes on the Group' The Press Wed.Oct.

member of The Group, wrote in the catalogue to her 1971 Retrospective Exhibition about the ideas her art friends brought with them from overseas saying,

In the twenties this was still not Picasso or Braque, but the Impressionists. Viola [Macmillan Brown] came back lit up about Puvis de Chavannes; Cora [Wilding] was determined to set us on the path of Cezanne; Ngaio [Marsh] had seen some Renoirs; Willy Montgomery who went many times to Tahiti first brought us news of Gauguin.<sup>129</sup>

Cora later wrote an article belatedly celebrating the centenary of Cezanne's death, which New Zealand had in fact overlooked. In the article she wrote of having had a dog named after the artist which everyone believed to be called 'St Anne' rather than 'Cezanne', such was the state of New Zealand's knowledge of the wider world of art in the 1920s.<sup>130</sup> At any rate, Cora had earned herself the respect of her untravelled artist friends by knowing of the works of artists such as Cezanne.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, when Cora had returned from her first painting trip overseas, she was one of the few students in her circle who had been abroad, and thus whatever style she had developed at that stage, would have been of some influence to the other students, surely. Yet these are not easily recognised paths of influence. Paths of influence are to be traced in a thrusting development of artistic endeavor which travels from master to student with ever increasing force and displays itself in a visual link via the fetishized art object, and is supported in a swarming discourse of affirmation, rather than reflecting the matrixial flow of influences, both visual and ideological, and the random engagement with contexts of a personal nature which manifest in the production of any work of art. Nothing is ever so linear that all 'outside' influences are irrelevant. I would suggest that the fact that artists such as Olivia Spencer Bower and Viola Macmillan Brown were younger artists whom visited Cora and went on sketching trips with her and that they were admirers of her work, points to a possibility of influence which may or may not manifest in the works of the younger women.<sup>132</sup> It however remains

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1935, p.16. Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>129</sup>Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 40 Folder 188 'Tourist brochures, magazines, programmes 1904-1971' Item 195, 'Evelyn Page : Retrospective Exhibition, Jan. 1971, National Art Gallery Wellington', p7. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>130</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.4] [box 2] 'Texts of addresses, Published articles, Radio Talks etc.' [misc] 'Cezanne of France'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>131</sup>Cora's focus on Cezanne's work also shows her familiarity with the ideas of Bell and Roger Fry, whose Post-Impressionist exhibitions in London Cora may have had the opportunity to see on her previous visit there.

<sup>132</sup>Viola Macmillan Brown wrote to Cora saying how much both she and Olivia Spencer Bower admired a

for someone other than me to trace the nuances in the paths, or even matrices of influence which relate the works of Cora Wilding to an alternative narrative to that which culminates in the modernism of Colin McCahon.<sup>133</sup>

While Cora was, as I see it, an accomplished artist in her own right and this she was for her whole life, rather than having her artistic career falling short upon her return to New Zealand, she has been unfailingly remembered for her work with children's health camps and the Y.H.A.N.Z.. As was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it appears that the 'recovery and celebration' work done by second wave feminists which saw women artists reclaimed Western-world-wide, failed to bother with Cora as she was already remembered for her health-work. She was already present as an historical figure and thus did not need saving, where a focus on a single identity was enough to see her role as artist overlooked. These two facets of Cora's life however were far from being opposed and in fact both represented her commitment to the aesthetic ideals of modernism respectively. Rather than seeing her engagement with health concerns as being a defeat, artistically, it is possible to see them as being indicative of a changing focus for Cora in her aesthetic ideals. Given that Cora was a woman from a well-off family, it was expected that she would have had some role in the wider community, and her own ideas on the role of women in society would have backed this up. During World War One, Cora had questioned her position in the world - her role as an artist and as a woman. Being herself a woman concerned with the role of women in society, it was important for Cora to be able to reconcile these different parts of her identity. Because of ideologies such as Vernon Lee's, Cora could be an artist and an aesthete, and also fulfill the role of the good woman (whose duty it was to work for the betterment of humanity) because

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water-colour Olivia had of Cora's. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.3] 'Correspondence, bequests etc.' [correspondence] to Cora from Viola at Arthur's Pass, Easter Sunday. Macmillan Brown Library. Whether or not Cora was of influence to these women artists as such, she worked hard in later years to try to encourage government support for artists to paint murals as well as speaking frequently on the importance of having a receptive community for an artist to prosper and grow, these factors, I identify as being indicative of a less direct but equally as valid path of influence which does not involve genius. Similarly, Cora may well have been of great influence ideologically to her fellow artists. Rita Angus appears to have shared similar views on art to Cora claiming in the Year Book of Arts in New Zealand 1947 that her intention was to '...show to the present a peaceful way ... As a woman painter, I work to represent love of humanity and faith in mankind in a world which is to me, richly variable and infinitely beautiful.' MS-PAPERS-6412-09 'Lecture notes 1983', p.6. Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>133</sup>Julie King has re-written Thompson into a narrative of New Zealand art history, but as a figure of unique standing representative of New Zealand's artistic development of the time, rather than being a link in the chain of artistic genius. Cora Wilding appears to inhabit a similar space in artistic narratives.

art was going to make the world a better place - this in itself added a feminist impetus to Cora's life, which will be discussed later. None of this in itself stopped Cora from being an artist or from being an influential artist of worth. Furthermore, Vernon Lee and the type of feminized aesthetic of health and beauty already discussed, offers the key to understanding Cora's move in establishing the Sunlight League, a League which centred the well-being of women and children in its activities. Modernism in art, offered a masculine discourse of aesthetics, whereas modernism in health, offered a feminine discourse which could readily apply theories of aesthetics to the raw medium of society and more importantly, to children.<sup>134</sup>

In this way, when Cora formed the Sunlight League in 1931, she was finding a middle ground for her concerns both as a subject gendered feminine and as an artist, rather than admitting defeat to a patriarchally determined society - ideologically she retained her femininity and agency within the male discourse.

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<sup>134</sup>In a way, what I have called the 'feminine discourse of aesthetics' is simply an *applied* aesthetics which has repercussions for women as gendered subjects.

Chapter Three:

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Celestial Antiseptic : The Beginnings of the Sunlight League

Now I must mention sunlight, the beneficial effects of which we are just beginning to realise and to make use of for the maintenance of health, for the prevention of disease and for the cure of certain diseases such as Tuberculosis and Rickets. From the outset I want to emphasise the importance of fresh air in conjunction with sunlight, for it is only when we make use of the rays from the sun in the fresh open air, not under glass, that the best results are obtained.

G.P. Crowden MSc MRCS LRCP<sup>1</sup>

Light is the message of impressionism, as the effort of early painters was to secure light, the quest of all philosophies.

Poole<sup>2</sup>

Cora Wilding formed the Sunlight League of New Zealand in Christchurch in 1931, and while I consider the League to have been a manifestation of an array of different influences - some of which have already been discussed, such as Vernon Lee's aesthetics, and some of which still remain to be discussed - as the name of the League suggests, the pivotal concern around which the Sunlight League was formed was the belief in the healing power of sunlight. Sunlight, it

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<sup>1</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.17] 'Sunlight League, Overseas Organisations, pamphlets etc. 1930s' [pamphlet] G.P. Crowden, The Peoples' League of Health Pamphlets: Water, Air, Light, Ventilation and Clothing, London, 1930. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>2</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [4.7] [notes] Poole, Light and Shade. Macmillan Brown Library.



was understood, could cure tuberculosis and in more general terms led to the overall invigoration of the human organism, but moreover, it worked within wider discourses as a celestial signifier for cultural norms and ideals. In her article 'Shedding Light For The Matter', Barbara Bolt discussed light (and by implication sunlight) in terms of an ideology rather than as a visual given. Similar ideas surrounding light and dark have come through in the work Black Bodies, and Mabel O. Wilson's discussion of Le Corbusier's The Radiant City, which has used this idea to illustrate the racial metaphors implicit in Le Corbusier's architecture.<sup>3</sup> This understanding of light offers a tool in the attempt to place sunlight in an ideological context regarding Cora Wilding and New Zealand because when viewed in this way, light is no longer a universal given, but as we found with the 'landscape myth' in the arts, can represent a specific way of seeing. The ideologies which spring from constructions of light are then by implication reflective of the wider discourses which support them. Regarding the use of light as a construct by the Sunlight League I would recognize the wider discourses of nationalism and imperialism as being invoked in a colonial context, as Josephine Wilson has suggested for Australian constructions of light.<sup>4</sup>

Sunlight invariably shines on the land in ways which unite bodies and places both ideologically and literally, an ideal which has already been discussed in relation to landscape painting and will be returned to later in relation to the Sunlight League Health Camps. Place and identity then, become one through sunlight and the marker of this identity comes through in the particular human bodies which inhabit it, where the skin acts as a signifier of sunlight and light is a cultural metaphor engaged in imperial myth-making. In pre-eugenic thought it was simply understood that the land did determine racial types. Specifically the particular light and the particular land a body inhabited resulted in a particular type of existence for that body in that the food available impacted on the well-being of the body and by implication the mind. This type of idea explains the existence of the 'dark continent' where dark skins were considered to be a manifestation of a dark land, which also allowed for the colonization process to bring light

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<sup>3</sup> '... blackness is a discursive practice exercised by the confluence of history, economics, geography and language, which conditions the *enunciative* function.' Mohanran, p.xiv ; M. O. Wilson, 'Dancing in the Dark : The inscription of blackness in Le Corbusier's Radiant City', in H. J. Nast and S. Pile eds., Places Through the Body, London, 1998, pp.133-152.

<sup>4</sup> According to Josephine Wilson's understanding of the Australian experience as discussed by Barbara Bolt, "light" becomes one of the technologies complicit in the colonization of countries, peoples and bodies.' Bolt, p.202.

through christianity and science.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in this way sunlight bridged the gap between self and environment, showing that the two were inter-related and that in fact this relationship between self and place was integral to concepts of identity and belonging - or constructions of nationalism and Empire. Light then, has been used to reflect beliefs of nationalism and imperialism onto the landscape and the bodies which inhabit it, in turn light becomes a vehicle for establishing norms and ideals - norms and ideals which are always racialised and gendered.

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In centring sunlight, the Sunlight League of New Zealand was reflecting contemporary ideas about well-being and nationhood, implicitly engaging with the discourse of imperialism, as well as inhabiting a sort of ideological borderspace. This borderspace allowed selves and environments to co-exist, where man was not - as was required for the artistic landscape - a transitory figure in an inhospitable land, but rather an inseparable part of that landscape.<sup>6</sup> In 1950s England, sunlight was used to break down the division between interior and exterior space - by bringing the outside in - in contemporary architectural designs which prioritised the use of glass.<sup>7</sup> This transgression of boundaries was also apparent in the work of the Sunlight League with its preference for encouraging houses to be built facing the sun.<sup>8</sup> Similarly light worked almost as a bridge (or at least existed in the borderspace) between Art and Health. Light as we saw, was an important consideration to the New Zealand artist, and light also had a role to play in discourses of health, both of which were important to constructions of nationalism, specifically at the time of the Sunlight League's formation.

The sun, and heliophilia have been prominent as symbols and metaphors in discourses, not to mention realities, since Ancient Egypt and Rome. The symbol of the sun came into its own in the period in question as can be seen in its centrality as a celestial symbol in Art Nouveau and also as a geometric form in Art Deco. Within New Zealand the symbol of the sun came forward through association with New Zealand produce, as well as the produce of other countries. Edmonds products were 'Sure to Rise', New Zealand frozen goods were advertised

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<sup>5</sup> Josephine Wilson has described this, as discussed by Bolt. Bolt, pp.202-3 ; Freud also called women the 'dark continent'.

<sup>6</sup> Beaven, p.17.

<sup>7</sup> R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory vol.1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London, 1994, p.76.

<sup>8</sup> The same could be said of the open-air schools movement.. Regarding sunlight in houses see 'To Returned Servicemen and women', [Cora Wilding Scrapbook], p.116. Youth Hostels Association of New Zealand.

as 'Frozen Sunshine', butter was marketed as 'Solid Sunshine', the Chelsea company showed a rising sun behind its factory, Imperial Bee Honey was the product of 'Sunshine, Flowers and Bees', Californian Raisins were 'Sun-Maid', and soap was sold as 'Sunlight', by the block and later by the bottle.<sup>9</sup> Health organisations also utilised the sun symbol specifically because some of them, like the Sunlight League, dealt with the health benefits of sunlight, but that sunlight was becoming part of the 'medical' discourse at all reflected a wider context of associations based in the notion of light as being true and pure - of being a steriliser and signifier of the Empire, just as was soap.<sup>10</sup> The emblem for the People's League of Health was a naked man on horse-back holding an Olympic-style torch jumping over the sun.<sup>11</sup> The New Zealand New Health Society used a simple sun shape in what, all things considered, looks like a postage stamp.<sup>12</sup> The Sunlight League of London used a silhouetted family against a stylised sun where the mother assists the child to reach out for the sun's rays and the father stands with arms outstretched, and on another occasion, a sun symbol with an unsexed naked (male) figure in silhouette in front holding a torch similar to the People's League of Health emblem, but in this emblem the figure stands in the contraposto - a pose which symbolised balance.<sup>13</sup> And of course the Sunlight League of New Zealand, in an act of definite emplacement, used the myth of Maui snaring the sun - their emblem being a design showing Maui pulling a Maori-styled sun up from behind a mountain range.<sup>14</sup> The Sunshine Society in Auckland also used the sun as its symbol.<sup>15</sup> The discourses surrounding health, especially mental health, spoke of a 'sunshine of

<sup>9</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 2] [newspaper] 'Frozen Sunshine : Imported Health from New Zealand' The Times : Sunlight and Health number, Tuesday May 22 1928, p.xxxii. Macmillan Brown Library ; Primary Products Marketing Department, Annual Report (Second), year ended 31 July 1938, Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives New Zealand, 1939, H-30, opp. p.36. Courtesy of Phillipa Mein Smith.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the imperial symbolism of soap see McClintock.

<sup>11</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] [pamphlet] C. J. Bond CMG FRCS The People's League of Health Pamphlets : On Education of the Public in Sex Hygiene. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>12</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] [booklet] N.Z. New Health Journal, Vol.2 No.1, Aug. 20 1927, p.10. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>13</sup> On the use of the 'contraposto' see D. Summers, 'Contraposto', The Art Bulletin, Vol. 59 No. 3, Sept. 1977, pp.336-61 ; Wilding Family ARC1989.124 Box 39 Folder 182 'Sunlight League - Correspondence and other material c1931-1947' Item 164, [correspondence] to Cora from Saleeby, Easter Sunday 1932. Canterbury Museum ; Baverstock Papers [MB 51] [iii5A] 'Sunlight League Papers, Correspondence etc. ca. 1935-45 BOX 1' [booklet] Sunlight : Journal of the Sunlight League, Vol.3 No. 4, Summer 1937. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>14</sup> The League motif was a winning design created by Miss Gladys Anderson in a Sunlight League competition run in the newspaper. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.23] 'Sunlight League Miscellaneous' [booklet] Sunlight League of New Zealand Booklet, p.1. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>15</sup> Baverstock papers [MB 51] [iii5A] 'Sunlight League Papers, Correspondence etc. ca. 1935-45 BOX 2' [magazine] Sunshine, No.16, June 1937. Macmillan Brown Library.

the soul'.<sup>16</sup> Thus if one cared to look for it, the sun was everywhere - by 1950, the ideal house was one with clean modern lines, which let the outside - and the sunshine, in. The sun, had become the symbol of progress.

In medical discourses of the time, specifically as found in that coming from the leader of the Solarium movement, 'Darkness' had a cameo appearance as the antithesis of light. C.W.

Saleeby wrote in his booklet 'Sunlight and Health':

Indeed, there is a whole series of diseases which can be prevented and cured by sunlight and which do not occur where people properly value sunlight and use it as they should. To those, some years ago, I gave the name of Diseases of Darkness. Tuberculosis and rickets are examples of these Diseases...<sup>17</sup>

'Diseases of Darkness' as a label was an attempt to remove the presence of diseases such as tuberculosis and rickets from the landscape of the upper-classes who suffered from these ailments in distressing numbers. Diseases were supposed to affect the degenerate and the poor in society, not the wealthy, yet tuberculosis especially, shocked in its propensity to infect the average human being irrespective of his or her financial position.<sup>18</sup> To name these diseases the diseases of darkness then, worked to alienate them within the discourse - something which as they attacked the privileged in society, could not be done in the reality. This type of labelling also worked to remove the taint of disease from the upper classes by blaming environment and thus lifestyle, rather than allowing for the association of disease with hereditary degeneracy.<sup>19</sup> The label 'diseases of darkness' then, like the label 'dark continent', linked the body to the place where darkness and sickness went hand-in-hand in racialised metaphors of Empire.

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<sup>16</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.18] [booklet] Dr A. Rollier The Therapeutic, Preventative and Social Value of Heliotherapy in Surgical Tuberculosis, p.20. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>17</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.22] 'Sunlight League, Miscellaneous Printed Material' [booklet] C.W. Saleeby Sunlight and Health, p.6. Macmillan Brown Library ; Caleb Saleeby was also one of the founders of the Eugenics Movement. Mein Smith, Mothers and King Baby, p.5.

<sup>18</sup>Moreover, 'Tuberculosis was regarded as a disease of civilization...' L. Bryder, 'Wonderlands of Buttercup, Clover and Daisies': Tuberculosis and the open-air school movement in Britain, 1907-39', in R. Cooter ed., In the Name of the Child : Health and Welfare 1880-1940, London, 1992, pp.72-95, p.73.

<sup>19</sup>This type of preference for blaming the environment has been called 'neo-hygenism' and as an ideology is present in a lot of the work done by the Sunlight League. Neo-Hygenism was an ideal which was in opposition to the ideals of the Eugenics Movement, although the two ideals could easily co-exist. On neo-hygenism, see H. Hendrick, 'Child Labour, Medical Capital, and the school Medical Service c.1890-1918' in Cooter ed., In the Name of the Child : Health and Welfare 1880-1940, pp.45-71, p.48.

As light held an important position both philosophically and symbolically in wider discourses, the fact that Cora established a League which in effect recommended heliophilia in the inter-war period reflected on the one hand the product of a life led as an aesthete, and on the other the wider concerns of New Zealand, as well as the Western world at the time. A general concern was being expressed about the living conditions of children, and the lack of medical/scientific knowledge available to the public as well as a growing concern with the health of the wealthier classes. Societies began to establish themselves, usually from the ranks of the well-off and educated, to try and bring a better standard of living to their people and to do so by spreading the new scientific knowledges of health. These new scientific knowledges of health were often based in the ideas of eugenics and in the case of the Sunlight League, based in an understanding of the newly understood benefits of sunlight.

While the physical condition of the members of society was a general concern in these 'health' groups, a focus on bodies was sparked in New Zealand after World War One when it was found that many New Zealanders failed to pass the physical requirements to enlist.<sup>20</sup> Fear then, sprang out of a concern for the protection of the nation, in that New Zealanders were not 'fit' enough to compete against other stronger bodied nations. There was also present amongst New Zealanders, a desire to prove themselves to be a race fit enough to inhabit the land, which was idealised to a great degree in colonial narratives - the converse is also possible of course, that the land, described as the land of milk and honey, required (ideologically) strong physiques of a national type to support the continuation of the myth of a land of plenty, which in turn substantiated the existence of a national identity.<sup>21</sup> Either way, New Zealanders were both afraid of not being strong enough to defend the British Empire, and at the same time were hoping to show themselves to be better than, the British whom (from the New Zealand point of view) war had proven to be very feeble indeed.<sup>22</sup> These then, were the kinds of issues present in New Zealand regarding national health at the time of Cora's engagement

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<sup>20</sup>Only 34% of World War One conscripts were completely fit. Tennant, p.23.

<sup>21</sup>On the idealisation of the New Zealand environment by colonials in terms of an Arcadian land of milk and honey, see M. Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies : The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900*, Auckland, 1990, esp. pp.24-27, and 'Natural Abundance', pp.29-40.

<sup>22</sup>James Belich has discussed the idea that New Zealanders periodically constructed themselves as 'better British'. See J. Belich, *Paradise Reforged : A History of New Zealanders From the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, p.21, p.30, pp.76-86.

with medical ideologies. Bodies, were becoming a focus for discourses of nationalism and medicine with all the power struggles inherent in the establishment of authority and identity, and to a lesser degree concepts of morality and mental hygiene were taking a place in the fore of discussions of health. The Sunlight League of New Zealand was a product of its time in that it largely shared these concerns and was representative of a much larger movement which saw the establishment of open-air schools, solariums, health camps for children, laws regarding mental defectives, and a growing focus on the individual body as being of worth to the nation. Cora travelled to Europe again after the apparently successful exhibition at the Graham Gallery explicitly to study the work being done abroad for damaged children and because of this, the Sunlight League of New Zealand had specific links to other international societies which give it a unique identity and role within New Zealand's history - those links I will now consider.

The Sunlight League of New Zealand was an Antipodean branch of the parent organisation which was established in 1924 by Dr C.W. Saleeby in London. The Sunlight League of London believed specifically in the healing potentials of Sunlight. These ideas were largely founded on the work of Dr Rollier of Leysin, Switzerland, who had established Alpine retreats where the sick, especially the tubercular cases, were taken to sunbathe and recuperate. It was considered that sunlight had the ability to sterilize and thus it was thought that sunlight would kill the bacilli of the consumptive patient. The Sunlight League of London considered sunlight to be the source of all light and called it the 'celestial antiseptic'.<sup>23</sup> Given that sunlight is, and always has been, free and available to all it is not surprising that so many societies, and even government departments embraced the ideology whole-heartedly.<sup>24</sup> Rollier's heliotherapy was explicitly linked to Greek ideals of sun-worship and beauty of form in the propaganda, and quaintly enough, he developed his methods in an attempt to save the consumptive woman who had stolen his heart.<sup>25</sup> These techniques of propaganda which linked Rollier's methods to the perfect race, were utilized across the board in an attempt to give the concept validation. Darwin's ideas, leading to the predominance of the discourse of eugenics, assured support for

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<sup>23</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.18] [Pamphlet] Sunlight and Health. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Bryder has identified the preference for Sunlight treatment exhibited by British School Medical Officers as representing a move to deflect attention from the 'real' causes of ill-health, namely malnutrition amongst children. This is a point which should not be overlooked in relation to all uses of sunlight as a treatment, but one which I do not see as being specifically relevant to Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League. Bryder, 'Wonderlands of Buttercup, Clover and Daisies', p.90.

<sup>25</sup> Cora Wilding papers [1.8] [notebook] '1903'. Macmillan Brown Library.

an ideology which linked itself to the strongest race of all time, where everyone it seems, wanted to be an Ancient Greek.<sup>26</sup>

Considering the time-frame for the establishment of these societies - 1924 in London and 1931 in New Zealand - sunlight became a ready supporter of discourses of inter-war nationalism. Linked to this was the national and imperialist construction that saw the ideal woman as the predestined mother of the race. This ideal was utilised in the focus on sunlight which saw it constructed as a potential mother-maker. Part of Rollier's understanding of the benefits of sunlight lay in its capacity to prevent and cure rickets. It was understood that a 'rickety', or 'flat' pelvis, often undetected in young girls would lead to problems in labour - the baby might not be able to be expelled through the ill-formed pelvis and both mother and baby's lives would be at risk in what would otherwise be a natural and safe procedure. Sunlight caused the production of vitamin D in the skin which in turn worked to cure undetected cases of rickets, (as rickets was caused by the lack in vitamin D) and thus the productivity of the mother with regard to children was increased. The sun was considered to be the key to the production of healthy pelvises and thus a strong nation. Women, were biologically constructed as breeders within the discourses engaging sunlight surrounding nationhood.<sup>27</sup>

Not only was the sun to be the healer for the deformed, gendered body, it was also constructed as being at the centre of the scientific world. All of the societies that promoted the medical benefits of sunlight, transposed the idea of the Son of God into the Sun of Science in a way that resembled Clive Bell's attempt at instating Art as the new religion.<sup>28</sup> Dr Rollier spoke of his tuberculosis patients as experiencing a 'spiritual re-birth' under the sunshine and fresh air of his clinics.<sup>29</sup> 'Medicus' writing under the auspices of the Sunlight League of New

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<sup>26</sup>On the popularity of Darwinism in New Zealand prior to 1900, see J. Stenhouse, 'Darwinism in New Zealand, 1859-1900', in R. L. Numbers and J. Stenhouse eds., Disseminating Darwinism : The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender, Cambridge, 1999, pp.61-89.

<sup>27</sup>This was also a construction of women enforced by medical understandings of eugenics.

<sup>28</sup>Macmillan Brown wrote in an article for the Sunlight League 'No nation or community has yet placed at the head of its ten commandments : 'Thou shalt not inflict on any innocent posterity any weakness of mind or body from which thou hast suffered.' Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] 'Eugenism : Health Aims and Standards : The Need for a New Instinct'. Macmillan Brown Library ; Apparently an overlap between the language of health and religion is a common phenomenon. "In most cases, the linkage is first one of language : the language of physical transformation and its promise often parallels that of religious conversion experiences.' H. Green, 'Introduction' in Grover ed., Fitness in American Culture, pp.3-17, p.8.

<sup>29</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.18] [booklet] A. Rollier MD, The Work Cure in Surgical Tuberculosis, p.3.

Zealand described Leysin in the Christchurch Star, as being '...the Mecca of sunlight believers, with Rollier as ... [the] prophet.'<sup>30</sup> And in a particularly biblical sounding script, Sir Truby King wrote to Cora in a telegram:

LEAVING OUT OF ACCOUNT THE ERUPTIONS OF VOLCANOES AND THE EBB AND FLOW OF THE TIDES EVERY MECHANICAL ACTION ON THE EARTHS SURFACE, EVERY MANIFESTATION OF THE POWER, ORGANIC AND INORGANIC, VITAL AND PHYSICAL, IS PRODUCED BY THE SUN. HIS WARMTH KEEPS THE SEA LIQUID / AND THE ATMOSPHERE A GAS, AND ALL THE STORMS THAT AGITATE BOTH ARE BLOWN BY THE MECHANICAL FORCE OF THE SUN. HE LIFTS THE RIVERS AND THE GLACIERS UP THE MOUNTAINS, AND THUS THE CATARACT AND THE AVALANCHE SHOOT WITH AN ENERGY DERIVED IMMEDIATELY FROM HIM. THUNDER AND LIGHTENING ARE / ALSO HIS TRANSMUTED POWER. EVERY FIRE THAT BURNS AND EVERY FLAME THAT BLOWS DISPENSES LIGHT AND HEAT WHICH ORIGINALLY BELONGED TO THE SUN / ... AND REMEMBER THIS IS NOT POETRY BUT RIGID MECHANICAL TRUTH... / ... HE FORMS THE MUSCLE, HE URGES THE BLOOD, HE BUILDS THE BRAIN, HIS FLEETNESS IS IN THE LIONS FOOT; HIS SPRING IS IN THE PANTHER ...<sup>31</sup>

While it appears that the sun, and the worship of light was the focus of the League, it is more likely that in the context of a post-enlightenment Western world, science and religion were blending within the dominant discourse. It is hard to gauge whether tracts such as these would have been considered blasphemous to the wider community, or whether science was merely borrowing the language of a more familiar discourse to substantiate and popularise its claims. What these ideas do represent however, especially as expressed by King, is that Sunlight was seen as being the link to an understanding of the existence of all life - human, plant, and animal - all were linked in important and 'scientific' ways and this, proved ultimately to associate the body with the land.

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Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>30</sup>Baverstock Papers [iii5a] [box1] [Newspaper article] 'Why Not a New Zealand Leysin?' Christchurch Star, n.d., p.17. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>31</sup>Punctuation added in pencil in the original ; Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.9] 'Correspondence, 1935-1943' [correspondence] Telegram to Sunlight League Christchurch from Sir Truby King, postdated 16JE31. Macmillan Brown Library.



In Britain at the time of the Sunlight League's formation in New Zealand, the People's League of Health published numerous pamphlets which were utilized for League purposes and at the same time illustrate the general components of a burgeoning fringe and progressively mainstream focus on health present in the Western world. The People's League of Health, which by its very title was aimed at the common denominator in wo/mankind, wrote pamphlets on sex, the environment, working conditions, alcohol abuse, diet, and the Welfare Movement as well as organising a special committee to report on 'Tuberculosis of Bovine Origin in Great Britain'.<sup>32</sup> The emblem for the People's League of Health symbolically represented the truth and health of sun and light in a pocket-sized version, in that the man depicted had a flame himself. The People's League appears to have seen itself as the sun of the image, of which the common man could take his own bit of truth (health/knowledge/light) and presumably pass it on.

The People's League offered advice on a wide range of subjects, but unsurprisingly the advice offered was of a gendered nature. The pamphlet 'What Every Lad Should Know About Sex' dealt with the sex drive of male adolescents, recommending chastity to protect the balance of the body as '... man's body is the most wonderful in all nature', as well as offering a chaste life as the only way to effectively protect women.<sup>33</sup> 'Few of us would tolerate the idea of stealing a five pound note from a friend, yet to damage a woman is a far greater crime and should be punished accordingly.'<sup>34</sup> In this pamphlet, cold baths, swimming and basically anything which could exhaust the youth and dampen his lust was considered good as the loss of sperm resulted in the diminution of masculine characteristics. The complimentary pamphlet to this one, entitled 'Knowledge of Women About Themselves and Their Sex', clearly saw women as *being* sexed whereas men *had* sexual desire in the same way that they *had* women.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore women were equated with their bodies in this pamphlet in that menstruation was the main focus for discussion where the former pamphlet had discussed sexual behaviour, rather than a body sexed male. The focus in this pamphlet was on de-mythologising the menstrual process to free it of shame and bring it into the light, or, into the realm of the spoken, the scientific and

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<sup>32</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] [pamphlets] The Peoples' League of Health Pamphlets. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. [pamphlet] Prof. Sir John Robertson, What Every Lad Should Know About Sex, London, 1930, p.11.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p.12.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., [booklet] Arthur E. Giles, Knowledge of Women About Themselves and Their Sex, London.

medical, which belonged to the doctor. That which was discussed at length was the possibility of menstrual abnormalities, confirming the belief that women's bodies were the site of the abnormal, and the provenance of the (male) doctor.

Booklets published by the People's League entitled 'Rules for Good Health' which were directed at boys and girls aged 8-12yrs, 12-16yrs and 16-20yrs respectively, while reflecting the ideas about female and male sexual bodies as indicated above, actually offered very little difference between their recommendations for each sex. What differences there were reflected the gendered social constructions of the time. Boys were encouraged to look after their bodies so as to get promotions at work, but girls were expected to have graceful and supple bodies for no reason at all, and the work advocated most strongly for them was housework.<sup>36</sup> As far as Cora and the Sunlight League of New Zealand were concerned in these matters, they largely followed suit. They advocated the move towards the discourse of professionalism which saw women's bodies especially, as the property of the doctor but at the same time advocated the increased awareness and responsibility of the woman and mother in their own and their children's lives. Also in regards to the construction of bodily sexual identities the Sunlight League was largely in line with the People's League's teachings, although the explicit teaching of the Sunlight League regarding sexual matters was more in relation to the choice of suitable partners than in regards to the way gendered sexed bodies were constructed. Overall, issues relating to the gendering of the subject for the Sunlight League came across most explicitly in relation to their health camps. Gender therefore, will be considered again later, with reference to the League's health camps.

There was also an association in Britain called the 'New Health Society' which worked along similar lines to the People's Health League and the Sunlight League of London. The New Health Society believed in the healing potential of sunlight and also promoted the representation of the woman's body as the site of abnormalities recommending that any 'symptoms' of menopause be brought immediately to the attention of a doctor.<sup>37</sup> According

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<sup>36</sup> 'Housework is excellent for girls; it requires thought in organising and provides hard exercise when done efficiently, thoroughly and quickly ...'. Cora Wilding Papers [1.22] [pamphlet] Rules for Good Health : #3 Girls aged 16-20, Rule #1. Macmillan Brown Library ; 'A well-developed man gets employment in preference to a badly formed weakly individual'. [pamphlet] Rules For Good Health : #3 Boys aged 16-20', Rule #7.

<sup>37</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] New Health Society : The Rheumatic Affections, p.1 ; p.4. Macmillan Brown

to the New Health Society of London, 'Health is not a quiescent state: it is a *continual striving* towards a harmonious relationship with the environment *founded on Knowledge*.'<sup>38</sup> Education then, was the key to a healthy nation. While this education was to be on the use of sunlight and fresh air in preventing disease, and on the existence of 'protective foods', it was also to be on the factors of heredity in both healthy and degenerate individuals.<sup>39</sup> Rather than specifically advocating the hereditary theory or its alternative the environmental theory of degeneration, it offered an understanding of human development which saw every individual as having a stock of potentials whereby the environment the individual inhabited, determined which of these potentials came forth - positive or negative. This type of understanding of heredity, while allowing for an emphasis on place rather than self, and again demonstrating the perceived link between land and body, was one which was more or less common in the writings of all the societies, especially in the motivational factors behind the work done for children.

The London New Health Society, of which Cora was a member, had a junior version in Christchurch calling itself the New Zealand New Health Society.<sup>40</sup> I have been unable to conclude whether Cora was an active member in the New Zealand New Health Society, or whether she had any involvement in its beginnings, but the existence of such an organisation goes part way in explaining the later existence of the New Zealand Sunlight League.<sup>41</sup> The objects of the original New Health Society were, in an abridged form, as follows:

- (1) To spread knowledge of health
- (2) 'To teach the advantages of right food, fresh air, sunshine and exercise, through the medium of newspapers, pamphlets, books, wireless and Lectures.'<sup>42</sup>
- (3) To work with all other available agencies, including women's organisations

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Library.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p.5.

<sup>39</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] on protective foods : J. S. Bainbridge 'The Food Value of Fish', NewHealth Vol. VI No.1, January 1931, p.15. Macmillan Brown Library ; on heredity : E.Moore 'The Mechanism of Heredity', pp.19-20.

<sup>40</sup>Cora became a member of the London New Health Society in 1928. Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] [draft] [correspondence] to leader of New Health from Cora, undated. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>41</sup>Cora was in Europe visiting other health institutions from May 11 1928 to June 21st 1929, and therefore cannot have been participating in these months. Mathews, p.103, p.108.

<sup>42</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] The Rheumatic Affections, inside back-cover. Macmillan Brown Library.

- (4) To influence caterers and heads of institutions to provide healthy food.
- (5) To advocate improvement in food handling and storage.
- (6) To stop contamination and adulteration of food.<sup>43</sup>

A focus on food and dietetics becomes apparent, but so too does a concern with the regulation of the power of burgeoning professions. The New Zealand New Health Society adopted these aims and objectives unchanged.<sup>44</sup> At the time of Cora bringing to life a Sunlight League in New Zealand, which eventually had branches in Geraldine and Ashburton as well as Christchurch (but to my knowledge failed to establish itself in other Antipodean centres including in Australia), Christchurch was more than familiar with many of the ideals the League was to embody, and offered fertile soil in which the League could flourish.<sup>45</sup>

The New Zealand New Health Society published articles on many of the same topics as the New Zealand Sunlight League was later to do. An article in the New Zealand New Health Journal of April 19 1927, discussed heredity and environment in a way which represented concerns apparently central to both societies.<sup>46</sup> Written by Eldon Moore, this article focussed on the controversy regarding the debate over heredity versus environment to conclude that both were contributing factors in any individual's progress. According to Moore, a child with good genes would never be a poor achiever, but a child with bad genes had the potential to either be a good or poor achiever dependent on his or her environment. He also went on to say that whereas the feeble could be fixed, the feeble-minded never could, which when coupled with newly developing ideas of psychology, worked to place the impetus on the child as the site of potential human stock. If a child of poor stock then, was put in a good environment, he could become an achiever and become mentally adequate, but should a child with weak genes be allowed to be swayed by unwholesome influences, he would fulfil his potential only as a mental defect and thus would be unsavable in his adult life. These types of

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<sup>43</sup>These objects are taken from the inside back cover of The Rheumatic Affections. Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>I am unaware of the life-span of the New Zealand New Health Society, but publications of the New Zealand New Health Journal survive from 1927 through to 1928.

<sup>45</sup>Mention is made of Geraldine and Ashburton branches in the Sunlight League General Committee Minutes. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.1] 'Sunlight League General Committee Minutes 1930-36'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>46</sup>E. Moore, 'Heredity and Environment', N.Z. New Health Journal, April 19 1927, pp.11-12.

ideas were common at the time, but specifically this form of eugenics was present in the Sunlight League's ideology. New Health editorials put emphasis on physical culture as being moral salvation - it would bring boys a 'high type of masculinity' and girls 'clear eyes, strong, well-formed bodies, and ... superfine instincts', they also extolled the virtues of sunlight, looser style school uniforms for boys, and suggested means for dealing with the 'perennial fly nuisance'.<sup>47</sup>

The New Zealand Sunlight League also had the concerns expressed in the New Health Journals at heart, but a comparison of the aims and ideologies of all the aforementioned societies will work best to display their respective similarities to the Sunlight League in its official form. The aims and objects of the New Health Society have already been given, and the aims and objects of the parent Sunlight League were:

- (1) To educate the public to the appreciation of sunlight and clean air as a means of health and a preventive of rickets and other diseases of darkness.
- (2) To spread the knowledge of new discoveries which concern the curative value of sunlight.
- (3) To co-operate with local authorities ... and all available agencies in furthering the aims of the League.
- (4) To stimulate efforts for the abatement of smoke, for the multiplication of open spaces, especially as playgrounds for the children of the poor and for the abolition of slum dwellings.
- (5) Pending housing and other reforms, to urge the setting-up of open-air schools, sanatoria, and sunlight clinics in the sunniest parts of the country.
- (6) The recording of sunshine in the streets and alleys of smoky cities as well as at health resorts, using means to indicate the ultra-violet activity of the sun's rays rather than their heat.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>This description of the benefits of physical culture to girls appears to equate to a description of a well-bred horse. Editorial The New Zealand New Health Journal, Vol.1 No.9, April 19 1927, Christchurch ; Editorial The New Zealand New Health Journal, Vol.1 No.7, February 19 1927, Christchurch ; Editorial The New Zealand New Health Journal, Vol.1 No.8, March 19 1927, Christchurch ; Editorial The New Zealand Health First Journal, Vol.2 No.4, November 21 1927, Christchurch.

<sup>48</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.18] Sunlight and Health. Macmillan Brown Library.

While the New Health Society's focus was clearly on food, it and the Sunlight League shared a common concern with sunlight as a means to health. Both lists of objects show an awareness of the need to educate the public and a focus on working with professionals in health. Both societies then, were engaged in the discourse of professionalism.

While the New Zealand New Health Society apparently had only one branch, and that in Christchurch, Sunshine organisations - like the Sunlight League - were established in other New Zealand centres independently of the Sunlight League of London. In Auckland a Mrs Nellie Ferner founded the Community Sunshine Association in June 1917, far earlier than Cora did her own League.<sup>49</sup> The Sunshine Association loosely worked in the same areas as Cora's League did. Cora in fact attended a health camp run by the Auckland Sunshine Association before attempting to run her own under the auspices of the League. In the Sunshine Association's magazine - aptly entitled 'Sunshine' - for June 1937 the objects of the Association were given at length. The focus of this association was clearly on the children of the nation, on their 'moral, intellectual and physical welfare'.<sup>50</sup> No mention was made of eugenics, mental well-being, or even of sunlight within the objects. Certainly there was no concern with beauty, where nature and the out-doors got no more than a perfunctory showing when mention was made of the encouragement of agricultural vocational training.<sup>51</sup> In a way, the Auckland Community Sunshine Association was indicative of an earlier and much simpler type of organisation than the Sunlight League. The Sunshine Association, without extensive delving into their actual practices, certainly appears to have been a simple organisation which held health camps and wanted to look after the children of the nation (not unlike the Young Women's Christian Association (Y. W. C. A.)) rather than to engage with wider medical and scientific discourses and put themselves out into the public arena.

The Sunlight League of New Zealand, while having a large part of its agenda coming from the parent organisation, borrowed from the New Health Society as well as voicing concerns central to neither these organisations nor to the Community Sunshine Association. The

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<sup>49</sup>Baverstock Papers [iii5a] [box 2] [magazine] *Sunshine* No.20, June 1938. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>50</sup>Object (a). Ibid.,[magazine] *Sunshine* No.16. June 1937, p.24.

<sup>51</sup>Object (e) 'to stimulate and encourage vocational (including agricultural) training'. Ibid.

Sunlight League of New Zealand's Aims and Objectives were thus far broader and in 1934 were given as:

- (a) To educate the public in the appreciation of sunlight and fresh air as a means of health, and through the medium of newspapers, lectures ... to disseminate knowledge.
- (b) To hold Children's Health Camps with the objects of making children better citizens, and to endeavour in camp not only to improve health and give the child happiness, but also to encourage appreciation of country life, love of beauty, also ideals of health, work and service to others.
- (c) To work for the improvement of children's teeth.
- (d) To work for better mental health.
- (e) To stress the food value of the wholemeal, milk, fruit and vegetables and to influence both institutional and home dietaries.
- (f) To work for smoke abatement and cleaner air, and to obtain comparative sunlight records through New Zealand.
- (g) To advocate a solarium for heliotherapy in the Alps, to encourage outdoor life and tramping, and to assist the work of the Youth Hostels Association of New Zealand.
- (h) To educate people through the medical and scientific advisors of the League, in the knowledge of the laws of heredity, the importance of civic worth and racial value, and by the study of eugenics to exchange racial deterioration for racial improvement.
- (i) To co-operate with agencies in allied work such as the Health and Education departments, the Plunket Society, the Open-Air Schools League, Community Sunshine Association, Home Economics Association, Free Kindergarten Association.
- (j) To avoid insularity and to utilize information from organisations in other countries regarding health work.<sup>52</sup>

Clearly the focus on foods, as shown in (e) above, came from the agenda of the New Health Society where the concern with sunlight expressed in items (a), (f) and (g) respectively, came from the objects of the Sunlight League of London. Item (h) can also be seen to equate to the New Health Society's desire to spread the knowledge of health in general. The specific differences from the other Leagues and Societies mentioned, lay in the attention given to the provision of health camps as given in (b) above, as well as the focus on children's teeth (c) and

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<sup>52</sup>The Sunlight League of New Zealand [Booklet] c.1934.

mental health (d). The main points of difference from the other health groups, specifically those pertaining to the running of health camps, will be looked into in greater depth, but it is now necessary to consider where these types of ideas came from as representative of the range of ideologies brought to the League by the integral members of the New Zealand Sunlight League themselves. While the wider context of ideas which lead to the formation of certain types of groups at certain times are indeed important to a discussion of the Sunlight League, specifically the dominant ideologies within the cultural context which motivated the formation of a chain of similar organisations, it is important to remember that the League itself was not merely a set of ideals and a written constitution, but that it was in fact made up of a diverse set of human-beings, some of whom were more instrumental than others within the workings of the League. It is they, as much as underlying discourses, who shaped the Sunlight League of New Zealand.



Chapter Four:

The Beautiful People : Sunlight League Membership

Sir Louis Barnett - 'Nature Versus Civilization'.  
Prof. J. Macmillan Brown - 'Physical and Spiritual Sunshine'.  
Dr C. W. Saleeby - 'How to Sunbathe'.  
Dr A. Rollier - 'Heliotherapy in School'.  
Dr R. Bevan-Brown - 'Balance Essential to Health'.  
Dr W. Aitkin - 'Smoke, Fog, and Health'.  
H.C.D. Somerset, M.A. - 'Childhood and Beauty'.  
Spencer Cotton, B.D.S. - 'Building a Tooth'.  
L.F. DeBerry. M.A. - 'Health Ideals'.  
Sunlight League of New Zealand<sup>1</sup>

Rather than seeing the Sunlight League of New Zealand as the ultimate result of one woman's ideological position and private experiences of life, I prefer to view it as a particular manifestation of a varied array of both ideological positions and individual personalities - as well as their accompanying contexts - which clearly sees the League placed within a sort of matrixial intersection of both borders and spaces. In this way, the League represented not only a manifestation in New Zealand of a health organisation imported ideologically from abroad, but also the beliefs and personalities of a specific group of people living in Christchurch in the 1930s. I have discussed Cora's experiences as an artist and how her aestheticism coloured her move to health activism. I have also determined the ideological influences coming from similar

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<sup>1</sup> Sunlight League of New Zealand, [booklet] 1934.

organisational bodies at the time, and now it remains for me to identify the particular group of individuals who aligned themselves with the interests of the Sunlight League of New Zealand. Who were the individuals attracted to the ideals of the Sunlight League, and how did their ideas intersect with Cora's? It is to a discussion of the minds and personalities of the members of the Sunlight League that I now turn.

The inaugural meeting of the Sunlight League was held in May of 1931 and a photograph and article were included in The Sun for Saturday May 16th. The photograph (fig. 10), showed Cora standing amongst the more prominent of the members of the newly formed League. The members, photographed on the verandah of the Wilding family home, were Dr Gordon Rich, Mrs John Montgomery, Miss Rose Muir, Miss M. Enright, Mrs J.K. Archer, Miss Cora Wilding, Dr Elspeth Fitzgerald, Mrs B.H. Gilmour, Miss M. McLean, Mr C.G. McKellar, Miss M. Andrew, Mr H. McD. Vincent, Dr A. Paterson, Dr T.L. Crooke, Mrs George Rhodes, Mrs Cracroft Wilson, the Hon. A.J. Stallworthy, Professor J. Macmillan Brown, and Sir Dudley Dobson. Of those photographed, Drs Fitzgerald, Paterson and the Hon. A.J. Stallworthy worked in an advisory capacity only as did other 'Technical Advisors' to the League.

Many of the members of the Sunlight League were in fact friends of the Wildings. Mr and Mrs J. Montgomery visited the family home sporadically from 1914, Dr T. L. Crookes was a member of Julia Wilding's musical club, as were the Cracroft Wilsons, Viola Macmillan Brown frequently visited Cora at Fownhope, having been at Art School with her and occasionally Professor Macmillan Brown visited the family too.<sup>2</sup> Miss May Andrew was another visitor from as early as 1927, while the McKellars were regular visitors through the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Miss Mary McLean was a good friend of the family, and having her physiotherapy training in common with Cora visited Fownhope frequently - often staying over from 1919 onwards.<sup>4</sup> Numerous other members of the League were also known to Cora and the family - William Baverstock was one of the foundation members of The Group and became a

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<sup>2</sup> Wilding Family ARC1989.124 Box 11A Folder 56C Item 56C, 'Visitor's book Fownhope 1911-1945, 1975'. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. ; Cecil McKellar seems to have been the individual member of the Sunlight League who was to give Cora most trouble in later years which ultimately led to her disgust and abandonment of the League in the early 1950s.

<sup>4</sup> Miss McLean's writing paper is headed 'Mary McLean Masseuse'. Cora Wilding Papers [4.1]



(Fig. 10) Inaugural meeting of the Sunlight League.

*The photo of the members of the League assembled on the front porch at 'Fownhope', was published in The Sun, on Saturday May 16 1931. This reproduction of the image is taken from the scrapbook Cora's mother kept of events relating to the work of the Sunlight League. In a way the scrapbook was the continuation of the Life Events Diary which finished the year the League was formed. The names of the executive officers of the League as photographed were given in the paper as, from left to right: Back row: Dr Gordon Rich, Mrs John Montgomery, Miss Rose Muir, Miss M. Enright, Mrs J.K. Archer, Miss Cora Wilding, Dr Elspeth Fitzgerald, Mrs B.H. Gilmour, Miss M. McLean, Mr C.G. McKellar, Miss M. Andrew, Mr H. McD. Vincent, Front row: Dr A. Paterson, Dr T.L. Crooke, Mrs George Rhodes, Mrs Cracroft Wilson, the Hon. A.J. Stallworthy, Professor J. Macmillan Brown, and Sir Dudley Dobson.*

Image courtesy of the Y. H. A. N. Z. [Cora Wilding Scrapbook], p.1.

prominent member of the Publicity Committee of the Sunlight League. The unofficial first meeting of what was to become the Sunlight League took place on September 21 1930 with Mrs Chilton, Miss Muir, Cecil McKellar and Drs Allison, Averill, Bevan-Brown and Aitkin attending.

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[correspondence] to Cora from Mary McLean 'Wednesday' 1954. Macmillan Brown Library ; Wilding Family ARC1989.124 Box 11A Folder 56C Item 56C. Canterbury Museum.

While those photographed in 1931 were likely to be utilized in an act of publicity, being prominent individuals within Christchurch and New Zealand at this time, the photograph is a relatively helpful tool to gauge the intellectual backing of the League. This backing then, was largely from the male intellectual elite, as well as the prominent women of the community. This may indicate that the League was at heart a women's organisation (11 of those members in the inaugural photograph were women, compared to only eight greying men) latching itself on to a learned pool of professional men to at once gain access to knowledge otherwise denied women, and to gain credibility in wider circles (the public sphere). This question, as to the ideological identity/ies of the League in relation to determining a type of categorical definition for the League - Art/Health/Women's/Scientific society, will be returned to in a later passage. Of all those who can possibly have had an influence on the formation of the Sunlight League as individuals, there are some whose ideological positions are easier to ascertain than others, simply because they were published writers, or outspoken in their ideals. Therefore, I will now briefly discuss those whose ideologies are accessible and likely to have had a role to play within the formation of the League, some of whom had a medical background, and others an artistic/literary one akin to Cora's own.

Although Cora's influence on the League has already been established, in that it was she who chose to form the League in New Zealand, and it was she who brought to that formation a knowledge of other health organisations and a knowledge of feminised aesthetics, it is still necessary to consider other factors of a more personal nature which may have been of influence to the League's founder. While the running of health camps which intended to instill a love of beauty and an appreciation for nature, clearly reflected Cora's understanding of a feminised aesthetics, the inclusion of the intention to run camps for girls which encouraged good citizenship, reflected the ideals of both her mother and father with respect to liberal and feminist beliefs.<sup>5</sup> An understanding of an holistic approach to well-being was also derived from Cora's up-bringing.<sup>6</sup> While Julia emphasised the importance of music and beauty, Cora's father emphasised the importance of a healthy and active body. Cora's father was a proponent

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<sup>5</sup> See p.48 of this thesis for previous references made to Julia and Frederick Wilding's ideological position.

<sup>6</sup> After Julia's death it was written in the Sunlight League Annual Report for May 1937 'Mrs Wilding was a strong advocate of the cultivation of both mind and body for which the Sunlight League was founded by her daughter.' Cora Wilding Papers [1.22] [report] 'Sunlight League Annual Report Year Ending May 9th 1937'. Macmillan Brown Library.

of physical culture and was an accomplished sportsman in his own right, playing in regional cricket teams. Anthony, her older brother, was a very successful New Zealand representative tennis player (he won ten Wimbledon titles between 1907 and 1914) and in a sense it was to fulfil the legacy of these two men in regards to a healthy active existence, that Cora's involvement with health activism grew.<sup>7</sup> While Cora's familial environment would have been of influence, it is unlikely that Cora's main contribution to the ideals of the Sunlight League - her specific understandings of beauty and citizenship - could be traced to either of the dominant males in her life. It seems more likely, that her mother Julia's interests in the arts would have allowed Cora to develop the aesthetic leanings necessary to embrace the ideology of the beauty of health in subsequent years. This interest in beauty came through in the running of Sunlight League Health Camps, and in the focus on encouraging 'outdoor life and tramping' which eventually led to the formation of the Y. H. A. N. Z..<sup>8</sup> But this is not to say that Cora's concern with beauty was ideologically unique to a feminised discourse of aesthetics; while eugenics was primarily about genetics and heredity for the survival of the race, it was also implicitly engaged with a concern for beauty in that it was the most beautiful who would survive - in a way, beauty was conflated with health in the discourse of eugenics.<sup>9</sup> But there are other personalities to consider in a discussion of Sunlight League membership.

While Professor John Macmillan Brown died in 1935, four years into the Sunlight League's life, he was undeniably an influence on the ideals behind the League. Macmillan Brown often held the chair at League meetings, and as has already been mentioned, was known to the Wilding family, his daughter being a friend of Cora's from Canterbury College School of Art. Professor Macmillan Brown, being the Canterbury College's first professor in English, held

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<sup>7</sup> Cora herself identified these influences on her life. Father contributed physical fitness and Mother contributed Beauty and Music. On another occasion Cora claimed to have been influenced by Anthony's physical prowess and her own innate dislike for physical pain and suffering. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.19] 'Sunlight League Health Stamps Campaign. Miscellaneous 1930s' [misc] 'Early Influences'. Macmillan Brown Library ; Baverstock Papers [iii5a] [box 2] [newspaper cutting] 'People and their doings' [1935]. Macmillan Brown Library ; A list of Anthony Wilding's other tennis achievements can be found in Belich, p.369.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Arthur Dudley Dobson was a leading personality in the League until his death, especially behind the formation of the Y. H. A. N. Z.. Cora considered the Y.H.A.N.Z. to stand for 'friendliness and understanding and mutual toleration between young people of different races, creeds and class.' and thus the Y. H. A. N. Z. offers another path to use in interpreting the ideological basis of both Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League, but one which I have chosen not to utilise here. Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 1] [misc]. Macmillan Brown Library ; For a history of the Y. H. A. N. Z. see D. Crooks, *Cora and Co*, Christchurch, 1982.

<sup>9</sup> Darwin also wrote on aesthetics and even Hitler was a painter! On Darwin's aesthetics see Tolstoy, p.28.

social influence and intellectual sway within the circles of Christchurch's elite. Although Michael Belgrave has dismissed the idea that Macmillan Brown could have been representative of an intellectual elite during the period, I would consider that when the Sunlight League is taken into account, it may in fact be that Macmillan Brown did represent, or was at least indicative of, the kind of intellectual elite present in Christchurch at the time.<sup>10</sup> According to Belgrave, Macmillan Brown was an 'amateur scientist', dabbling in the ideas of eugenics in a way that mirrors Cora's interest in science, and the leanings of the League itself, as well as illustrating the blurred boundaries between professionalism and 'amateur dabbling' at this time (and also indicating Belgrave's belief in the implicit difference between amateur and professional knowledges).

Belgrave understood Macmillan Brown to be a man who believed in the ultimate homogeneity of humankind where intellectual and moral betterment were the ultimate goal, and that following the diffusionist school of anthropology he believed the Maori to be essentially Aryan.<sup>11</sup> Because of this, Macmillan Brown's attempts at understanding the Pacific reflected his imperialist ideals : if British culture was the sign of progress, then colonialism must be an extension of, and proof for the supremacy of, British culture. This meant that 'migration' for colonists, ideologically had to be to a 'British' environment rather than a Pacific one, as the latter would allow for the possibility of and in a way necessity of, cultural change and identities in flux.<sup>12</sup> To allow for this type of imperialism, Macmillan Brown's ideology put weight on the idea that the environment led to national types - which meant that for him, the landscape needed to be understandably British for the subjects to also be British.<sup>13</sup> However, according to Belgrave, for Macmillan Brown the New Zealanders of the future,

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<sup>10</sup>M. Belgrave, 'Archipelago of Exiles: A Study in the Imperialism of Ideas: Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown', Masters of Philosophy thesis in History, University of Auckland, Auckland, 1979, p.23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.12, p.23, p.67.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.31.

<sup>13</sup>Conveniently New Zealand, climatically as well as geographically, resembled Britain to a degree which allowed for a side-stepping of land-based differences in favour of similarities which allowed for a British identity for New Zealanders on Pacific soil. This was also possibly why Australians found a sense of nationalism earlier than did New Zealanders - the mythology of Empire could not overcome the geographic differences of the Australian landscape as reality and ideology, and thus from the times of early settlement place and body merged in ways which left the Australian different from the Briton.

Less subject to the rigorous winters of the 'Teutonic North' ... would not have the 'steel hard' character of his or her ancestors. This would produce a national type 'less lymphatic and stoic' with more abandoned 'sanguine optimism', 'more bouyant and sunny' and 'less subject to fits of depression.'<sup>14</sup>

Changes in the social and political climate in the late 1890s, led to a disillusionment with these types of ideas of social evolution which manifested themselves in a heightened voicing of imperialist sentiment which for Macmillan Brown, led to the proposing of conscious selection (the self-selection rather than natural-selection) of breeding partners to avoid racial decay.<sup>15</sup> This latter manifestation of Macmillan Brown's ideas can be found in the Utopian novels he wrote after his retirement, Riallaro: the Archipelago of Exiles (first published 1901), Limanora: the Island of Progress (first published 1903) and an unpublished manuscript written during the same period.

Macmillan Brown's Utopias, written under the pseudonym 'Godfrey Sweven', were in effect descriptions of the ideal society as set forth by the Sunlight League.<sup>16</sup> Or at least one component of it. The Utopias ridiculed 'fake medicines, social flattery, smoking, institutionalised religion and servile profiteering by shopkeepers' while they supported selective breeding and democracy.<sup>17</sup> Literature in this new land, was valued only for its social purpose as an encourager of patriotism, where contemporary literature was valued as a product of progress and traditional literature was de-valued as it spoke to and of an irrelevant past.<sup>18</sup> Tolstoy as we saw, also considered literature (as an art form), only worthy as something with a social purpose. This put Macmillan Brown at odds with Cora's modernist leanings, but at the same time saw him loosely in support of her ideas regarding the social role of works of art, their revolutionary potential, and the need to produce works that reflected the present rather than imitate the past. Macmillan Brown was also a Darwinian and a Spencerian.<sup>19</sup> The Utopias described a society where the laws of evolution were understood

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<sup>14</sup>Belgrave, p.118.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.32, p.103.

<sup>16</sup>The pseudonym 'Godfrey Sweven' could have referred to a group of 'God-free Seven' although who those seven may have been, I would not like to hazard a guess.

<sup>17</sup>Belgrave, p.92.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.95.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p.97.

and manipulated so as to enhance the progress of mankind.<sup>20</sup> Belgrave considered Limanora to be a work which could be regarded as a 'platform for the eugenics movement', but it could also be regarded the 'platform for the Sunlight League' in that it is likely that Macmillan Brown's Utopias were what was envisaged under item (h) of the League's constitution: 'To educate people ... in the laws of heredity ... and by the study of eugenics to exchange racial deterioration for racial improvement'. It is likely that had the societies described in Macmillan Brown's Utopias had the technology, everything would have been genetically engineered for the betterment of the (British) race. It thus seems likely that Macmillan Brown was responsible as an influential member of the Christchurch elite for the focus on eugenics within the League, although the eugenics ideology itself was a very common theoretical position to have before World War Two.

Maurice Bevan-Brown, likely to be the member of the Bevan-Brown family present at the initial meeting held to discuss the formation of the League, had been a frequent visitor at the Wilding household from as early as 1916 and his father, affectionately known as Captain 'Fruity' Bevan-Brown, from 1912.<sup>21</sup> Maurice Bevan-Brown was an individual whose views firmly lay within the field of psychology. In 1944 a booklet was published entitled Mental Health and Education in which he discussed the importance of the first five years of a child's life in the development of psychological well-being while advocating a revised school system where corporal punishment was abolished and 'parenting' was taught to girls.<sup>22</sup> Bevan-Brown argued that while much importance lay in the development of the child in the early years, what was done in the years of adolescence could either encourage or discourage the healthy tendencies instilled in the child from the home, which was an attitude reflected in the treatment of children at the Sunlight League Health Camps. Because of this, the character of the teacher *and* the parent was of utmost importance. Bevan-Brown discussed 'mental health' in this text in terms of 'the health of the mind, or soul, or self, or person ...' and thus considered the current education system too narrow in its sole focus on the intellectual component of the human organism, rather than the emotional and moral components.<sup>23</sup> In

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Wilding Family ARC1989.124 Box 11A File 56C item 56C, March 22 1912 ; Feb 5 1916. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>22</sup>M. Bevan-Brown, Mental Health and Education, Christchurch, 1944?, pp.15-16.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p.4.



this definition of mental health Bevan-Brown was clearly identifying an embodied self which suffered. Furthermore he gave a definition of the signs of mental health in terms of '...a capacity for friendship, adequate courage, self-confidence, and a capacity to love someone and/or something outside the self...', and in a draft copy of an article 'Balance', written anonymously by a member of the Bevan-Brown family for the Sunlight League, health was described in terms of a functioning state 'where all our mental and physical functions, all our thoughts and emotions smoothly and harmoniously carry on their work, subordinate to the directing force of our personality expressed as the will ...'.<sup>24</sup> Basically these extracts described the qualities the Sunlight League proposed to instill in children so that they could become worthy citizens (an orientation which Tennant identified as being a unique component of the Sunlight League Health Camps), while also demonstrating the moral, socially constructed notion of mental health from the time.<sup>25</sup> Maurice Bevan-Brown then, was a stout supporter of the type of psychology developing at the time of the League's formation, which linked psychological instability in later life to bad parenting and lack of self expression, while also showing a belief in the necessity of a holistic approach to health. These are some of the ideas that were of great influence to Cora in her running of children's health camps and were probably the emphasis intended in item (d) in the League's Aims and Objects - 'To work for better mental health'.

The female advisors of the League, such as Ada Paterson, Elspeth Fitzgerald and informally in later years Hilda Ross, represented the widening of possibilities for women within the professions, as well as the gendered construction of that widening. The prescribed area for women within the larger society of New Zealand was clearly in regards to the interests of women and children, or, in the interests of those things traditionally associated with the private sphere. Paterson (1880-1937), was a Dunedin-born woman who became a school doctor, child health administrator and community worker.<sup>26</sup> She was like Cora, interested specifically in the health of girls over boys, and believed like Bevan-Brown, in a focus on childhood as being of importance to both the mental and physical well-being of the grown

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p.7 ; Unfortunately I do not know if this article was written by Maurice, although it seems likely. Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box2] [draft] 'balance'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>25</sup>Tennant, *Children's Health the Nation's Wealth*, p.90.

<sup>26</sup>*The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: Volume III*, Auckland 1996, p.387.

adult.<sup>27</sup> It has been said that Paterson was a pioneer in her concern for children's minds as well as bodies, which was a focus in the health camps she ran in the 1920s.<sup>28</sup> This awareness of growing minds and bodies in childhood was also a primary concern for Cora in the running of camps, as I will discuss in due course. Hilda Ross was another example of women's engagement with professionalism and health; she ran health camps in the Waikato before becoming a member of parliament for the National party in 1945 and also entered into frequent correspondence with Cora.<sup>29</sup> Mrs Cracroft Wilson, another founding female member of the League, was the head of the Christchurch Plunket Society and the Girl Guides, and Miss Rose Muir, also at the inaugural meeting of the League, was the Matron of the Christchurch Hospital.<sup>30</sup> Mary McLean appears to represent the feminist leanings of the League; she was a Christchurch City Councillor, the National Secretary to the Pan Pacific Women's Association Conference in 1952, a delegate to the Manila Conference in 1954, and also held office in the National Council of Women.<sup>31</sup>

Another member of the Sunlight League, H.C.D. Somerset, the author of Littledene : A New Zealand Rural Community, supported Cora's belief in beauty, as perhaps many less out-spoken members of the League did.<sup>32</sup> Considering himself to be '... fully in accord with the aims of the Sunlight League on the physical as well as the aesthetic side ...', Somerset wrote an article entitled 'Childhood and Beauty' on behalf of the League which was reproduced in newspapers and in booklet form.<sup>33</sup> In this article, Somerset wrote of the child : 'I believe that his quest is a great search for beauty and his passion is to express it in himself through his creative ability'

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. ; see Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth, pp.62-83 for Ada Paterson's involvement with health camps.

<sup>29</sup>See Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth, pp.92 -97 for a discussion of Hilda Ross's role in the Health Camp Movement.

<sup>30</sup>On Mrs Cracroft Wilson see Woods, p.4 ; Cora Wilding Papers [1.10] 'Correspondence 1944-53' [correspondence] From Mary King to Cora, June 19th. Macmillan Brown Library ; On Miss Rose Muir see Mathews, p.115.

<sup>31</sup>Mary McLean was a Christchurch City Councillor. C. Newman ed., Canterbury Women Since 1893, Christchurch, 1979, p.62 ; was a president of the National Council of Women. Ibid., p.16 ; was the national secretary to the Pan Pacific Womens' Association 1952 Conference. Ibid., p.144 ; was at the 1954 Conference in Manila. Cora Wilding Papers [4.1] [correspondence] From Mary McLean to Cora, December 18 1954. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>32</sup>Littledene was one of New Zealand's first case studies in social and economic history. See H.C.D. Somerset, Littledene : A New Zealand Rural Community, Wellington, 1938.

<sup>33</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box2] [Correspondence] From Somerset to Cora, June 20th 1934. Macmillan Brown Library.

and argued that beauty in all contexts stood in for liberty.<sup>34</sup> Obviously Cora was not alone in her specific beliefs about art and beauty, having found this support in the words of Somerset. This works to illustrate the prevalence of the ideals of the aesthetics of health within the wider circles of the intellectual elite while also showing that ideas pertaining to art being 'good' could be rewritten to fit the discourses of health, psychoanalysis and the needs of childhood.<sup>35</sup>

William Sykes Baverstock was also an integral member of the League, but to its organising capacity rather than to its ideological position - although as an artist it is possible that he too sided with Cora and Somerset in their support of beauty. According to Baverstock's brother, William Baverstock was the man behind the woman, so to speak, in that Cora had the ideas and the passion, but Baverstock had the clear head and managerial skills required to successfully run the Sunlight League and health camps. In his book In Memory of William Sykes Baverstock, it appears that H.S. Baverstock wished to lift the memory of his late brother above the mere role of secretary to Cora, and within the League which for all intents and purposes he was, to the more fitting role of manager. William Baverstock was certainly an active member of the League, he worked tirelessly on the Publicity Committee and was likely to have supported Cora's ideals regarding art and aesthetics trained as he was as an artist/designer, but this is certainly far from saying that the Sunlight League of New Zealand owed everything to him, as his brother has attempted to do. Baverstock was however, a prominent figure within Christchurch for the duration of his life, working extensively with the Canterbury Society of the Arts, The Group, the Robert McDougall Gallery, as well as working for numerous other civic-minded projects.<sup>36</sup>

The question being alluded to here, regarding the 'central figure/s' of the League, is a problematic one. On the one hand, Cora was repeatedly described as having the social standing and feminine charms required of a woman to drive other people to work for her, essentially because she did not have the skills to do these things herself.<sup>37</sup> While this is not an inaccurate

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<sup>34</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box1] [newspaper cutting]. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>35</sup>By this I mean that psychoanalysis hinged on the construction : repression = bad ; expression = good (within of course a socially sanctioned context).

<sup>36</sup>See H.S. Baverstock, In Memory of William Sykes Baverstock O.B.E., F.R.S.A., n.p. n.d., for the full list of his Canterbury engagements.

<sup>37</sup>Patricia Sargison described her as such, see Sargison, Notable Women in New Zealand Health, p.49.

claim, in that it seems that the technical advisers of the League were utilised for their capacity to offer knowledges and respectability which were not available to Cora simply because she was a woman, it does overlook the leadership skills and abilities that Cora did possess - mainly because these skills were of a 'feminine' nature and therefore under-valued. Similarly, it is not much of a step from the above representation of Cora, to see her in the position of an empty figure-head for the League - or perhaps a figure-head full of hot-air. This type of understanding allows for much scope in regards to the kind of fame-stealing attempted by William Baverstock's brother, where Cora was constructed as incapable of running the League without William Baverstock and where it was the men of the League who did all the 'real' work. Following this type of argument, it is possible to create a narrative which results in the complete usurpation of Cora by the male members of the League. Why stop at William Baverstock? It could be argued for example, that the ideals of Macmillan Brown's Utopias formed the basis of the League's ideal society. Similarly the other academic and medically trained members of the League had strong views, so perhaps it was they who brought the League into existence, if the League itself was not their idea, surely everything else about it was. Or perhaps, given that many of the originary members of the League were known to the Wilding Family, the League was rather a product of the minds of her parents and their friends than it was the product of her own iron-willed passion at all. On the surface of it, these could all be valid interpretations of the League's formation.

On the other hand however, Cora was an independent woman with a passionate iron will holding independent ideas that at times intersected with the ideals of the wider communities within which she traversed, but were also far from being mirror images of those ideals, and in many instances this is how she has been remembered.<sup>38</sup> Although the League, as is any organisation, was made up of a diverse range of individuals which in this case came together for a common cause, where any attempt at prioritising some members of the League over the others, within limits, will be a subjective venture, it would also be unwise to discredit Cora Wilding from being an influential woman of intellectual standing as well as social sway within

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<sup>38</sup>The description of Cora which comes through in Crookes' Cora and Co. : The First Half Century of New Zealand Youth Hostelling appears to give her agency as a woman of influence and independence but clearly gendered independence and influence describing her as pushy and charming in her efforts to bring the Y.H.A. into life in New Zealand. Crookes, p.14 ; Similarly Mathews represented Cora as independent, strong-willed and able in her own book, where society's needs, organisational regulations, and a sense of womanly responsibility to the nation were ultimately the only things to stand in the way of her ambitions. See Mathews.

the League. Clearly what Cora brought to the League, which set it apart from many other organisations dealing with community health, was a belief in beauty and art. This comes across not only from the ideologies which link her to Vernon Lee, but also in the many radio talks and newspaper articles she wrote on the subject. In a sense, the Sunlight League was a temporary outlet for her belief in the healing and peace-making potential of art. After 1950, at which time the League effectively ceased to exist, Cora continued as an active and passionate advocate of the arts for the good of wo/mankind. The simple fact that in later life, post-League, Cora continued to work for the same ideals that had driven her in her earlier years, adds credibility to the interpretation of Cora Wilding which I am offering here - specific contexts and key personalities of the Sunlight League aside, Cora remains the ideological aesthete behind the League, as well as being the motivational agent behind it. That these later ventures were to a degree successful also implies that Cora survived quite well without say, the secretarial skills of William Baverstock, or the backing of her parents' friends.

The League also had many other women members - proportionately, the Sunlight League appears to have had more women members than it did men.<sup>39</sup> In this, when it comes to an attempt to determine the dominant figures within the League as well as the ideological leanings of the League itself (which may or may not amount to the same thing) there is a sense of tension between the dominant male voices in the League and the predominant female membership. The written traces of male ideology may not reflect the motivations and intentions of the female membership. The concern I have in this, is that in a sense one is faced with the option of labelling the League just another patriarchal society, or of labelling it a women's group - a loosely bound feminist organisation perhaps. However, due to the fact that the League was a composite of the ideals of many, the Sunlight League was both of these things. In this way, it becomes apparent that the League could have been, to the minds of men like Baverstock and Macmillan Brown, a completely different entity from the League as understood by Cora and the other women of the League, where the one, may not necessarily have valued the work of the other. Clearly the aesthetics came from Cora, while the concern

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<sup>39</sup>Sunlight League Membership records for 1933-35 show there to be 265 female members to 79 males, or 77% female membership where a sex is able to be established for the member. Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.6] 'Sunlight League Membership Records 1933-35'. Macmillan Brown Library.

with children was indicative of the wider concern of women for children as well as the explicit ideas of Elizabeth Gunn, Ada Paterson and Elspeth Fitzgerald. Eugenics came as a focus for the League from Macmillan Brown, but this too was a concern present within the wider community - of men and women; of New Zealanders and Britons. While it could be said that the League was all things to all members, it is also apparent that the League was an organisation which worked explicitly for the health and well-being of New Zealanders - especially Cantabrians, and thus was clearly a health organisation above all else.

The Sunlight League of New Zealand was however, not a static entity any more than it was a unified one. While I would argue that the League was a women's organisation, following in the ideas of Cora's aestheticist beliefs and ostensibly engaging with contemporary discourses of health and well-being and implicitly with discourses of nationalism, all of which saw the male members of the League in a relatively superficial position (utilised to give a public front and voice of authority), I would concede that this was not the identity of the League for the totality of its existence. In part, the changing focuses of the League explains the interplay between Cora and the activities of the main body of the League. At times Cora was in line with the developing League's agenda and at times she was at odds to it, wishing to retain the authenticity of the League and its original ideals. Clearly while Cora was one of the people behind the League and its ideology in its formation, Cora and the League were not one in the same and at some point it seems that metaphorically the League left her, to follow the leadership of men such as Cecil McKeller. Cora of course was also a subject in flux. One example of this in regards to her changing ideals, saw the Cora of the painting trips abroad who had set ideas about racial superiority, who became the Cora of the Sunlight League who was a proponent of eugenics, by the 1950s to have become a sound believer in the importance of inter-cultural understanding, describing individuals of mixed descent, like Picasso and Rivera, as exemplars of the human race.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>... another factor in bringing together the nations of the world, besides painting is the mingling of blood' Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 1] [misc] notes on Braque and Cezanne [1950]. Macmillan Brown Library ; This change in ideas also reflected the changing circumstances of a post-war world fearing atomic power, but nevertheless illustrates that Cora was not static in her beliefs while the Sunlight League as a body developed ahead of her.



(Fig. 11) 'To-Day's Garden Party'

*Miss Cora Wilding, Mrs W. Willes, Lady Victoria Braithwaite, Mrs J.F. Studholme, Mr H.G. Marsh and Miss Ngaio Marsh, at the Sunlight League's garden party at 'Thorrington', the home of Charles Clark. This photograph appeared with an accompanying article in a Christchurch newspaper.*

Image courtesy of the Y.H.A.N.Z. [Cora Wilding Scrapbook], p.78.

The Sunlight League of New Zealand was both indicative of wider concerns in New Zealand - eugenics, child welfare, nationalism and health - and representative of the ideas of the individual personalities who made up the membership of the League. The individuals who made the League what it was, were largely the relatively well-off who had the time and in some cases money to devote to the work being done. The leading men in the League were educated and opinionated, as were some of the women members - most of whom, it could be argued, attended meetings and working-bees for companionship rather than because of ideological commitment. While there were numerous influences from the beginning, some manifestations of the ideology of the League come to the fore, primarily because of their success. In this the running of childrens health camps stands alone, as does the formation of the Y. H. A. N. Z.. The Sunlight League also worked for smoke abatement so that benefit could be gained from natural sunlight and established what was known as the A1 dental scheme in

schools to encourage oral hygiene. They also claimed to be the first organisation to sponsor free milk in schools in New Zealand (Mary McLean was largely responsible for the achievement of the latter two goals). Many talks were given over the radio and to live audiences as well as texts being published in magazines and newspapers. Garden parties were also held to raise money for the League's work and to advertise their ideals, the garden party held at 'Thorrington', the home of Charles Clark (fig. 11) being an example of but one of many. During the War, Cora arranged Gardening and Keep Fit meetings to work towards the war effort under the auspices of the League (although these were largely independent ventures). While much work was done by other members of the Sunlight League, as this text centres Cora's involvement with the League, it is this that will be considered in the following chapters.



Chapter Five:

Studying the Figure for Introduction into Landscape  
(1928-1935)

This class will be conducted for the purpose of sketching from nature in oil, water colour, black and white etc. Suitable places within easy access of the city will be visited. During unfavourable weather a costume model will be posed for the purpose of studying the figure for introduction into landscape.

Canterbury College School of Art Syllabus 1909<sup>1</sup>

The skin as both ideological construct and physiological reality comes through as a point of theoretical consolidation within the writings of the Sunlight League and the ideas of Cora Wilding. Children attending early Sunlight League Health Camps, as well as the women partaking in Sunlight League Keep-Fit Classes, were taken into the open-air where sunlight worked to enhance the pigmentation of their skin which was understood to be an indication of the benefit of its rays. In the open-air skin reddened, skin peeled and skin browned - in some descriptions the white skin tanned to an ebony black.<sup>2</sup> Maximum exposure of the skin to the sun was believed to result in maximum benefit to the body, so long as the skin on the back of

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<sup>1</sup> Baverstock Papers [ic] 'Landscape Painting from Nature' Canterbury College School of Art Syllabus :1909, p.16. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>2</sup> '... their skins burnt brown, sometimes almost black, with the healing radiance of the sun.' Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [newspaper cutting] 'Sea-Bathing and Sunlight are Nature's Greatest Cures', The Star, n.d.. Macmillan Brown Library.

the neck was protected and sun-bathing was enacted to strict guide-lines of gradual exposure under the watchful gaze of professionals. The emphasis on the role of the skin in well-being, lay partly in its ability to cool and to warm - that it was understood in fact to be nature's enforcer of physiological balance and harmony.<sup>3</sup> The skin became the visible marker of healthy bodies because it could indicate an organism that had been enlivened by the natural elements - not just the sun, but the sea and the wind - and in turn indicated a self that was balanced, both physiologically and symbolically (tanning symbolically represented balance because it indicated a self who spent a portion of their time undertaking healthy recreational pursuits). The skin was also understood in the writings of the Sunlight League and similar organisations to act as both a boundary that protected and as a boundary that allowed for transmutation. The consideration of the skin as a point of merging with the outside world saw it in the position of signifier of place, but moreover it symbolised a comprehensive understanding of existence that shunned boundaries as fixed unmaleable regions in favour of constructing them as potentially harmonious sites of balanced interaction. Symbolically, the skin and its existence as an unbounding boundary represented Cora's belief in the oneness of humanity - for a peaceful and harmonious world, different cultures needed to engage in a relationship of interaction. This can be understood in terms of Ettinger's matrixial transmutability - skin pigmentation was no longer the signifier of the boundary between self and other, neither ideologically nor physically. This was the basic ideological structure behind Cora Wilding's understanding of all creations of difference and thus of boundaries - men and women; nature and culture; Maori and Pakeha; art and science - in that they all needed to interrelate to attain harmony and balance, or, to attain a democratic state of self expression and well-being. This then, was the metaphor in the discourse surrounding the tanning of the skin, and it was also the over-riding ideological understanding behind the introduction of the figure to the landscape as it was undertaken by Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League.

Before Cora founded the Sunlight League of New Zealand, and in turn organised the League's health camps from 1931-36, she travelled extensively studying the heliotherapy centres of Europe and the child-care facilities of Britain. Cora travelled to England arriving on May 11th

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<sup>3</sup> The skin was described as being 'almost an "internal secretary" organ' because of its many 'functional relationships'. Baverstock Papers [iii5a] [box 1][newspaper cutting] 'How to Use Winter Sunshine', The Star, n.d., Macmillan Brown Library.

1928 and promptly began her time abroad by working in the Children's Orthopaedic Department at a hospital in Alton, Hampshire until the end of August.<sup>4</sup> She also visited the Caversham Hospital and the St Mary's Hospital in London before travelling on to the Finsen Institute in Copenhagen where sunlight treatment was explicitly favoured.<sup>5</sup> Cora was familiar with the 'Sandy Point' retreat for crippled children which in 1922 described itself as a 'modern Bethesda' using frequent references to Greek mythology to substantiate its validity where crippled bed-ridden children were lowered into the sea on rope cradles in a baptismal fashion by local fishermen to achieve the benefits of sun, sea and breeze.<sup>6</sup> Cora was also familiar with the work of the Metropolitan Asylums Board Queen Mary's Hospital for Children, Carshalton Surrey, which provided bedding open to the air, a remedial gymnasium and 25 full-time teachers.<sup>7</sup>

After a brief trip back to New Zealand, Cora continued researching abroad, where she found that treatment centres were often sites of beauty, and visited one of the more influential figures in health circles in Europe, Dr Rollier, and his sanatorium in Leysin, Switzerland. The specific ideal of Auguste Rollier's schools was a focus on the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual aspects of the growing self, and this was an influential ideal for the running of Cora's camps. The school's purpose was 'to direct not only the body of the child towards the sun which regenerates it, but also to direct his spirit towards Him Who is the Light and Who gives a meaning to life and an object to effort.'<sup>8</sup> In these schools the programme offered was an alternation of physical and mental exertion, with a preference for the 'ventral or dorsal' position (which was favoured for the expansion and development of the chest as a preventative as well as cure, for tuberculosis) both for studying and resting, undertaken in the open-air. Cora found the man who ran the 'school in the sun' to be an attractive gentleman, tall, strongly built and very bronzed with a small dark moustache (which was likely to have helped

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<sup>4</sup> Mathews, pp.103-4 ; While in England she visited an exhibition featuring Cedric Morris, showing that art, was not completely forgotten. Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 1] [catalogue] 'Cedric Morris May 1928'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>5</sup> Mathews, p.104.

<sup>6</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.18] [Booklet] 'The Waters of Bethesdon'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., [Booklet].

<sup>8</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box2] [misc.] 'School in the sun'. Macmillan Brown Library.



*Despite Cora's trip being for the purpose of studying the health-care facilities abroad, she still found the time to paint. This watercolour was painted while visiting Dr Rollier's sanatorium in Leysin, Switzerland. This work illustrates the link Cora was making between art and health, in that a preference was being shown for the painting of crisp, snow-covered mountains, which like beaches, were good locations for sun-bathing.*

(Fig. 12) Leysin, Switzerland  
Watercolour,  
Location unknown.

Art in New Zealand, Vol.2 No.5, September 1929, p.33.

with the appeal of his clinics and techniques alike).<sup>9</sup> While in Milan Cora studied the work being done at another children's hospital, holding 1500 children in Winter and 4000 in Summer, which displayed pictures of Mussolini at every opportunity.<sup>10</sup> The work being done here was very regimented and disciplined with children clad in uniforms and teachers expected to give each other Roman salutes. Although Cora was not impressed with the military overtones at the Milan hospital, she was struck by the beauty at this and the other Italian hospitals she visited.<sup>11</sup> Similarly in Germany, Cora was most impressed by two homes for crippled children which were set in 'the country amidst beautiful woods.'<sup>12</sup> She also described the 'Sunshine Home' for blind children which she found in the midlands, in terms of the beauty of its gardens even though the inhabitants could not appreciate it, as if that somehow

<sup>9</sup> Rollier's clinics were almost exclusively headed by women. Cora Wilding Papers [1.8] [notebook] '1903' Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [misc.] '3YA talk 1934', p.3. Macmillan Brown Library.

made the beauty all the more real and their plight more sad.<sup>13</sup> Many of the places Cora visited were concerned with the care of cripples, concerned with training them so as to be of use to society, where one such organisation promoted the idea of a register of cripples while their general aims were to prevent crippling, employ the cripple, and to curb public opinion of the cripple.<sup>14</sup> Other organisations were against the label of 'cripple', preferring the less degrading 'handicapped', but the overall concern with cripples appears to indicate a preference for utilising them as part of the wider society and at the same time raising their standard of living. Similarly the concerns over children appear to have focussed on these issues, where the ideas of what constituted being of benefit to society differed with the aspirations of each nation. With all these new ideas to apply to the New Zealand context, as well as with the influences already discussed in previous chapters, Cora returned to New Zealand and decided to establish a Sunlight League, the brief of which included the running of children's health camps.

Cora's move in looking to establish her own child health-care facilities in New Zealand, saw her become a part of the Health Camp Movement in its most diverse stage. One of the few works which has dealt with the Health Camp Movement in New Zealand is Margaret Tennant's Children's Health the Nation's Wealth. While I do not consider this work to cater for the existence of camps like those run by the Sunlight League, I do consider it to offer a good account of the social context in which the camping phenomenon arose. Tennant described the Health Camp Movement as representative of a number of key social and cultural manifestations for the period - health camps represented the burgeoning focus on the 'child' as a category in human development; a move towards state control of family affairs which materialised in the form of the school medical system; eugenic ideals, and a concern over inadequate health (prompted during World War One when it was discovered that only 34% of conscripts were completely fit).<sup>15</sup> As fore-runners of the Health Camp Movement, Tennant identified the open air schools movement (which was a German idea and saw schools run from 1904 in Germany in the fresh air as part of a treatment for tuberculosis and was adopted as a principle in New Zealand from 1914), as well as a growing move towards camping as a

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<sup>13</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.8] [notebook] '1903'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>14</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.17] [misc.] 'some suggested objects of a counties association for the welfare of cripples'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>15</sup>On the child and state control see Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth, pp.14-18 ; p.23.

recreational pursuit rather than a practical necessity (the Young Men's Christian Association (Y. M. C. A.) held camps in New Zealand from 1910).<sup>16</sup>

With the decision made to run health camps under the auspices of the Sunlight League, Cora travelled around New Zealand observing other camps before embarking on running her own. Cora visited the Auckland Sunshine Association's January 1931 camp, Ada Paterson's camp at Otaki, the Waikato children's camp run by Hilda Ross and William Paul and founded in 1927, helped with the second camp run at Motuihi, and a camp at Gisborne.<sup>17</sup> Dr Elizabeth Gunn had organised the first health camps in New Zealand and she had understood camping as a means to overcoming malnutrition, where weight gain was the only desired result and in itself was viewed as a preventative against tuberculosis. A desire to convey higher standards of hygiene was also present, with Gunn teaching toothbrush drill. However, Gunn's camps were focused on the weak and feeble children where their bodies belied their health. Later camps began to broaden their approach to childhood well-being, but in the earlier camps, like Gunn's, an awareness of the mind of the child, or any understanding of a holistic approach to health, was absent.<sup>18</sup> Of all the camps Cora attended, the camps held by Hilda Ross and Ada Paterson were those she found most pleasing, working as they did with a more holistic approach to health. The Hamilton camp was a non-rigidly-medical camp in that its main objective was to provide a holiday for those otherwise unable to have one and its focus was largely on the beauty of the natural landscape.<sup>19</sup> Both Paterson's and Ross's camps were concerned with the general well-being of the child, rather than the 'fattening of human stock', although even in these camps a certain element of this was inevitable, given that weight gain

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.35 .

<sup>17</sup>Cora found the Sunshine Association camp to be rather military in its outlook, dressing the children in khaki uniforms. It was also for the most part heavily reliant on the Health Department for both staff and funding. Cora, presumably with an awareness of the threatening nature of a regimented camping experience on budding psyches, as well as having a general distaste for all things military, explicitly avoided the running of her camps on these lines. She wrote in a draft for her booklet on Health Camps that camps were intentionally run on co-operative rather than military lines where co-operation clearly indicated a democratic principle. Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [draft] *History of New Zealand Health Camps*, p.5. Macmillan Brown Library ; Tennant, *Children's Health the Nation's Wealth*, p.102 ; Cora also appears to have visited Karitane in 1930. Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 11A Folder 56C Item 56C. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>18</sup>During the 1930s and 1940s psychological approaches became more common regarding child health. This new approach which saw preference given to an holistic type of understanding of well-being, was only possible after concerns over child mortality were lessened by a declining death-rate. See Mein Smith, pp.225-237.

<sup>19</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.19] [pamphlet] 'Waikato Children's Camp League Inc' 24th Nov. 1938. Macmillan Brown Library ; Tennant, *Children's Health the Nation's Wealth*, p.92.

could be measured whereas gain in 'well-being', could not (and there had to be some sort of proof for their continued existence and in some cases funding from the Health Department).

It becomes apparent in Cora's notes that her interests in the running of health camps were not so much with the explicit fixing of the body and raising of good stock as were the camps of Elizabeth Gunn, but with the intention of creating well-rounded citizens free from ill-health of any type. In the notes Cora took on the camps she visited in New Zealand, it is clear that her ideal of a good camp translated into one which worked towards developing the citizenship potential of the child. Citizenship could in turn be defined for Cora by way of the definition Maurice Bevan-Brown gave of health at around the same time - a willingness to help others, a capacity to love others, and a sense of civic duty - which worked to conflate worthy citizenship with health. Cora wrote of her experience at the Otaki camp, 'I felt here, perhaps more than in other camps, that the best was accomplished for future citizenship and right living.'<sup>20</sup> Similarly she wrote of the camp at Hamilton, 'Hamilton seems to develop citizens, who act upon the belief, that if a democracy is to work well, each individual must put forth his best effort to its support.'<sup>21</sup>

Again, as in the references made to the overseas children's health organisations, Cora focused on the importance of beauty, as well as adding a consideration for the teaching of art and artistic appreciation. In a comment made regarding education in general in the early 1930s, Cora explained, 'One is glad of new Art training work in schools by self expression releasing and controlling inhibitions and negative attitudes of a life time. Besides [a] sense of beauty being developed which may be an abiding spiritual source of enjoyment.'<sup>22</sup> When Cora came to drawing up the guidelines for the running of her own health camps, she followed in the footsteps of what she believed to have been the most important aspects of the other camps - explicitly including the intentions of instilling a love of beauty, an appreciation for nature, and the encouragement of worthy citizenship, where the two former objectives were constituted as a means to the latter and all were understood to belong under the rubric of health.

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<sup>20</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.19] [misc.] notes on Health Camps. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. ; In a draft for a booklet on health camps Cora wrote that the help of art training for a child, was 'to think and use his imagination', to provide the power to plan and co-ordinate shapes which was to help in the 'art of harmonious living' and to 'teach appreciation of form'. Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [draft] 'Children's Holiday and Health Camps', p.6. Macmillan Brown Library.

Cora's first health camp was run the same year the Sunlight League was formed. At this first camp in 1931, the second ever to be held in the South Island, four little girls were taken to the sun-porch at Mrs Ladbroke's house in Geraldine to spend a few nights in the country.<sup>23</sup> Cora wrote to her mother in a letter dated October 25th of this 'holiday' camp, 'The children are very responsive to the Beauty of everything and already have learnt to distinguish the notes of the fantails, magpies ...'<sup>24</sup> The point of the earliest camp then, was the enjoyment of the children and their appreciation of the natural beauty of New Zealand, and this was a constant intention throughout Cora's involvement with the League's camps. In 1935, Cora identified the special features of the Sunlight League Health Camps as the teaching of swimming, the emphasis on good posture, the 'teaching of the laws of health unconsciously by practical application' (which included the use of health plays and the feeding of only wholemeal goods), and the desire to 'interest children in country things and nature study' by way of talks and activities.<sup>25</sup> Art and nature, were understood to be health-giving manifestations of balance and harmony and in this way they were understood as being beneficial to the child psychologically as a future citizen, where swimming, good-posture and an understanding of the health laws, led to a physically fit future citizen. In promoting them both, Cora would have understood herself to be encouraging the health of the whole self in these camps, which could in turn allow the citizenship potential of the child to develop freely for the good of the nation/Empire. This understanding was reflected in the comments made by Drs McLaglan and Phillipps who reported that a Sunlight League camp held in 1934 'attempts something a little different from the others. It tries to do something for the children's minds and psychology, as well as for their bodies ...'.<sup>26</sup> Although Drs McLaglan and Phillipps saw this ideal for psychological well-being as a unique component of the camps, Ada Paterson's camps had also been concerned with the psychological well-being of the child. Similarly while Cora's camps emphasised citizenship, nature, and 'country things' Hilda Ross's camps had shared these concerns, as had the Boy Scouts' Movement. It seems then, that rather than having been avant-garde examples of health

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<sup>23</sup> Cora's camps were run almost exclusively for girls.

<sup>24</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [4.2] 'Correspondence: 1880s-1970s' [correspondence] From Cora to Mrs Wilding, Oct 25th. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>25</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.9] [correspondence] to 'Sir', 20th Nov. 1935. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>26</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.8] [misc.] 'Extract from Dr McLaglan's Report for January 1934'. Macmillan Brown Library.



camps in the period, as Tennant's book may inadvertently lead us to believe, Cora's camps were a hybridised form of many of the camps she had come into contact with both in New Zealand and overseas.<sup>27</sup> It was then not so much the content or form that the Sunlight League Health Camps took, but rather the attitudes and purposes of those involved with them, that differentiated Cora's health camps from many of the others being run at the time.

Cora was interested in the well-being of the nation and thus the Empire and these interests she held in common with the Health Camp Movement as a whole. Her specific understanding of what constituted the well-being of the nation and in turn the Empire however, was determined by her understanding of what a democracy was, and because of this, the emphasis in her health camps was somewhat unique. Cora's construction of the democracy where the future-citizens of her camps would exist, involved the belief that every person required the ability to express themselves freely which in turn allowed them to fulfill their position within society.<sup>28</sup> In a way, this type of ideal belied the underlying belief in democracies as the highest and most natural ordering for society coupled with an understanding of the psychological implications of repression. Health camps then, for Cora, involved the teaching of both self expression and an understanding of social obligation and the willingness to fulfill this obligation so as to create the perfect democratic citizen - or perhaps to allow the perfect democratic citizen to develop. Self expression, was also an attempt at alleviating the potential threat of mental and emotional instability in later life - art was encouraged as it allowed for immediate self-expression, and was a skill which could be utilized throughout life. According to Philippa Mein Smith, after the Second World War the democratic state was privileged as the only environment in which healthy children could develop into worthy citizens.<sup>29</sup> From this point of view, alternative political systems, like communist states and dictatorships were a form of illness in the political body which led to illnesses in the individual body where free expression of the self was restricted.<sup>30</sup> Overall, Cora's motivations seem to have lain in the establishment

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<sup>27</sup>The daily schedule for the children who attended camps run by Cora was in line with both the 'school in the sun' run by Rollier (without the educational component) as well as being like many of the other health camps already mentioned - from Elizabeth Gunn's early camps, to the camps held contemporaneously in South Canterbury.

<sup>28</sup>This reflected the understanding of the 'new education', which had as its goal the allowance of every child to reach their full potential. Mein Smith, *Mother and King Baby*, p.229.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p.239.

<sup>30</sup>Eugenics also saw the national body written on the individual body. From this point of view, Fascist states eventually suffered from psychosomatic disorders.

of a race of people who were worthy of the democratic system in which they lived - a democratic system that required both men and women.<sup>31</sup>

The kind of understanding of democracy described so far, saw the democratic principle translated into the body. A democratic state allowed for the equality of individuals to have the right to self expression as well as having a distinct purpose within the whole.<sup>32</sup> While each member of society needed freedom and had an important and unique role to play, which was of course a gendered role (notably not the mental defective, who was incapable of personal fulfillment or societal engagement), the self also had 'members', or, 'components' (physical, mental, emotional, sexual ) which needed freedom of expression and had an important and unique role to play within the well-being of the total self. This type of democratic understanding of the human self, which saw the body as signifier for the state, illustrates the holistic approach Cora took to both health and life. On a higher level, cultures also needed freedom and had unique roles to play within the world (Cora believed for example, that the West provided material knowledge, while the East provided spiritual knowledge, which were both complimentary and important roles) - all of which, ideally led to a harmonious and democratic world order.<sup>33</sup>

As Joan Burbick has described for nineteenth-century America, this type of focus on the body worked to unite society under a banner of sameness - all have a body and if that body is constructed in a uniform, natural and self-regulating way, then symbolic democratic equality ensues: there are no political divisions.<sup>34</sup> A focus on such ritualised bodily habits as eating,

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<sup>31</sup>In the 1920s the 'Girl Citizen Movement' had encouraged the same ideals for citizenship for the girl between 14 and 20 years, as Cora did in her health camps. Democracy, beauty and self expression were taught to the girl citizens. 'The Girl Citizen Movement of the 1920s : 'Our Best, Always'' in S. Coney et al., Standing in the Sunshine : A History of New Zealand Women Since they Won the Vote, Auckland, 1993, pp.136-7.

<sup>32</sup>This idea was reflected in Cora's belief that even the Maori had a role to play within national art developments (an opinion not shared by many others at this stage in race-relations ) - every component of the whole was important.

<sup>33</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 1] [misc.] 'Possible Subjects for Cup Tape - Record Entries PAGE 2'. Macmillan Brown Library ; Similarly Cora considered Eastern and Western art to be complimentary where the West was naturalistic and the East abstract, writing 'Today it appears as though Western and Eastern conception[s] of art are fusing and coming together to create [a] new art of [the] future.' Cora Wilding Papers [4.4] [box 1] [misc.] 'Queen Marys'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>34</sup>J. Burbick, Healing the Republic : The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America, Cambridge, 1994, p.3. A focus on the sculpted male body also attempts an ideological unification of the globe through bodily metaphors, see Budd, p.121.

washing and defecating as found in health camps, while ostensibly aimed at the correcting of learned habits of an unnatural and therefore unhealthy type, in fact provided 'a common basis for [an] understanding that transcends all difference', while also indicating attempts at social regulation on a massive scale.<sup>35</sup> In this context, physical strength was viewed in terms of political strength, which was particularly relevant to the tumultuous political factors in the America of Burbick's study, but was also relevant to the New Zealand context. A desire to unite both Maori and Pakeha under the rubric of health could be seen to be an underlying motivation for the equalising, democratising nature of health ideals within the focus on bodies in New Zealand at this time.<sup>36</sup> This type of focus on the democratic principles of equality and self-expression within Cora's camps, saw these camps as having an explicit focus on the formation of worthy citizens - a factor that as the camps were run for girl-children, was embedded deeply in the concerns of 'first wave feminism' even though much of the emphasis in the camps was on health and exercise.<sup>37</sup> Cora's health camps celebrated the League of Nations' birthday with the enacting of a politically motivated play, which demonstrated not only that Cora had a firm belief in the good of democracy, but that she also favoured political awareness and responsibility - notably among girls. Cora's ideas regarding Health Camps then, while embracing the new scientific advances of the time, were complex in their roots, seeing self expression as the ultimate saviour of wo/mankind whether that be through art, or through a democratic society (arguably Cora achieved both of these in her own life).

Cora's concern with the 'citizenship potential' of the girl-children attending camps, and their role as future citizens in a democracy, saw her located within the discourse of 'first wave feminism'. 'First wave feminism', as I discussed it in the introduction to this work, is a categorical label which has often been considered to have no relevance to New Zealand history

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<sup>35</sup>Burbick, p.92 ; On the social regulation of the body see B. S. Turner, *The Body and Society*, London, 1997, esp. pp.64-6.

<sup>36</sup>Which is not to overlook the reality - that Maori health was not treated with the same concern as Pakeha health, and that women's and men's bodies were treated differently within the dominant discourses and within the reality of the historical past.

<sup>37</sup>In notes for a talk before the Women's Guild in 1943 Cora wrote 'Many of the fathers and brothers of camp children are risking their lives for freedom and the preservation of democracy. It is these democratic principles which Health camps have unrivalled opportunities for instilling.' Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [draft] 'address to West Eyreton Women's Guild 16th Oct 1943'. Macmillan Brown Library ; In a draft for a booklet on health camps Cora wrote 'Democratic principle of respecting rights of others specially inculcated by allowing others to sleep, and specially this applies at night.' Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [draft] *History of New Zealand Health Camps*, p.9. Macmillan Brown Library.

much after suffrage was won for women in 1893. If however, as it seems likely, not only is it misleading to describe feminism as having been embodied in two waves, but moreover that post-suffrage feminism was in a large way a continuation of the beliefs of the suffrage feminists, then in Cora Wilding we see the continuation of the belief in women as equal contenders for citizenship with men - a category which was held in esteem rather than to be expected as a God-given right. Although Cora was not actively involved with work done by other women's/feminist organisations, and while she was not so much concerned with working actively towards legal equality nor economic equality for women, nor with the concerns of the working class woman as such, Cora was representative of the type of post-suffrage feminist identified by Marilyn Lake as being the exemplary citizen.<sup>38</sup> Melanie Nolan's Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State, has discussed post-suffrage feminist activity in New Zealand in terms of economic independence and citizenship for women, but rather than portraying Cora as a woman concerned with 'economic' or 'political' citizenship, during the period under discussion I would describe her as a woman concerned with 'social' or what may even be best described as 'cultural' citizenship for women. The simple fact that Cora favoured health camps that centred children's rights as democratic citizens and ran those camps exclusively for girls, placed her within a discourse of post-suffrage feminism that centred female citizenship, and was outside of the model offered by McDonald regarding attitudes towards the child. Within this discourse of femininity and citizenship, women were going to play an important role in the future development of the nation, not only as mothers, but as agents in their own right, who were free to contribute to the social and cultural wealth of New Zealand as they were best fitted.

This ideal of female citizenship centred on the concerns of the white, middle-class women of New Zealand, but it was no less feminist because of its elitist motivations.<sup>39</sup> The focus lay on this segment of society because it was they who were reading the liberal and progressive books,

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<sup>38</sup>Organisations such as the National Council of Women, the Women's Division of Federated Farmers or the Women's Institute - although these organisations were in contact with the Sunlight League throughout the years it was in operation, and delegates from the other organisations and the Sunlight League attended each other's meetings and co-operated in organising the Sunlight League Health Camps (providing food and labour); the 'exemplary citizen' was an ideal wrapped up in theosophical beliefs, among others. Lake, p.7, p.51.

<sup>39</sup>The Enlightenment ideal of the citizen was racist and ethnographic, but ostensibly 'universal, free, and equal'. A. Cuthoys, 'Citizenship, Race, and Gender: Changing Debates over the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Rights of Women' in Daley and Nolan eds. Suffrage and Beyond, pp.89-106, p.90.

and they who had the time to spend at, and access to, the facilities required for the building of the 'good citizen'. Cora and women like her, dealt with the ideal of the good citizen in a way which saw it as an open category as far as race and class were concerned ideologically, but in reality these were the groups set outside of the work being done in the cause of 'betterment for society' by way of raising 'good citizens'. The 'good citizen' was a culturally constructed category which failed to take cultural differences into consideration, just as ideas at this time regarding the assimilation of the Maori into the Pakeha way of life failed to recognize that the 'modern' society was not a signifier of natural evolution, but in fact a signifier of European culture. Similarly while 'class' was not explicitly a barrier in the way to achieving 'good citizenship', because 'class' became in many ways conflated with 'health' - both being socially constructed categories - the health camps run by the Sunlight League failed to accept children from 'bad' homes which were considered indicative of bad genes and poor health when these were more than likely the signs of the home-life of the working class. This means that Cora was in a way, out of touch with the concerns of a large portion of the community, but in saying this, it is important to point out that the ideal of the good (white middle-class) woman citizen was an ideal of a person who worked towards the greater good for all - which meant also championing the rights of the worker and the racialised other. The important thing for Cora at this early stage in her engagement with feminist activities in the form of the running of health camps for girls which centred on 'encouraging good citizenship', was to teach the leaders of tomorrow how to be good and fair people, and as such, society would benefit in due course - girl children weren't just going to pass on their knowledge of health to their off-spring, they were also going to pass on their ideals of citizenship which were learnt at Cora's health camps - ideals which would have been passed on to Cora by her own mother.

An aspect of the Sunlight League camps that saw them stand alone, was their intention to replicate the familial environment - or in the case of children from poorly developed families, to supersede it. Many other health camps, focussed as they were on increasing the physicality of human stock, preferred to take on as many children as could be accommodated. The Southern Canterbury Health Camp Committee's Summer Health Camp for 1936 had 50 children at camp, while the camps run by Ada Paterson averaged 80 children per camp.<sup>40</sup> Cora specifically intended to run small camps with her first consisting of a mere 4 children (due to

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<sup>40</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.9] [report] Summer Health Camp 1936. Macmillan Brown Library ; Tennant, p.81.

financial considerations) and the others staying far below the norm for other camps at the time, usually accommodating between 15-30 children.<sup>41</sup> Small camps, following the American model, meant that each child could have more attention from the camp attendants and experience a sense of belonging and stability unavailable in the larger camps.<sup>42</sup> According to Bronwyn Dalley, child welfare in New Zealand has centred around the idea that children are best catered for by a familial environment, where what constituted the best familial environment changed through time.<sup>43</sup> In light of this, Cora's preference for family-units (or hapu) in camp reflected the ideal construction which located the child within the malleable construction of the 'best family'.

Given that Cora's camps were for girls only, the prioritising of a familial structure within camp also represented the gendered notion of girls and women as belonging to the domestic sphere. The helpers at the camps run by Cora were taken from respectable Christchurch Girls' Schools (St Margarets' and Rangi Ruru) in an effort to encourage the relaxed, domestic-style settings of the camps, as well as to encourage the nurturing tendencies of the teenaged girls.<sup>44</sup> While this would have resulted in a sense of sisterly solidarity in its ideal form, it also reflected the financial restrictions of running health camps. Even when the running of camps was to fall into other hands in later years and permanent facilities were needed, Cora was still keen to retain a sense of the small familial groupings of earlier camps, promoting an idea for a dormitory style building that allowed for the division of children into smaller groups within the whole.<sup>45</sup> She also considered that while larger boys' camps could be run, it was important that girls' camps were still of a relatively intimate nature.<sup>46</sup> For Cora, it was important that the domestic situation was a comfortable and well learned one for girl-children, seeing them as she did, in terms of the future mothers who would be at fault should they fail in their parental

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<sup>41</sup>The children on Cora's camps were aged between 9-12yrs. Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth, p.104, p.107.

<sup>42</sup>The Scouts Movement promoted the ideal of smaller camps. Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 39 Folder 184 'Scouts' Item 175, 'Scouts - notebook 1930'. Canterbury Museum. Larger camps also meant that bullying and homesickness could remain unnoticed, an aspect of camp life which Cora is likely to have wished to avoid.

<sup>43</sup>See B. Dalley, Family Matters : Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand, Auckland, 1998, p.365.

<sup>44</sup>Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth, p.106.

<sup>45</sup>Cora's design included '... a large central administration block with large open-air dining or community hall to seat 100 children, and with a kitchen attached. The children's sleeping accommodation was in family or 'hapu' units of 24 children.' Cora Wilding Papers [1.1] '22nd April 1936'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>46</sup>In 1936 it was decided that Cora was to run 4 smaller girls camps while Mr F. Davis was to organise and run a camp for 100, or possibly 400 boys, apparently to be financed by the T.O.C.H. Ibid., '22nd May 1936'.

role and in turn adversely affect the psychological well-being of their offspring.

Mothers-in-the-making especially, needed not only to know how to cook, clean and keep the family healthy, but they also had to be of sound mind, which clearly meant for Cora, an ability to work within an intimate and nurturing setting.

The explicit focus on girls within the Sunlight League Health Camps - and within the League itself - was another relatively unique component of their organisation. Segregated camps were the norm, but when camps were held solely for a single sex, it was more likely that boys were provided for as they were the natural sex to fit into the camping lifestyle, according to current opinions on gender. For Cora, it was important that girls be taken on camp because for one thing, girls were going to be the future mothers of the race - it was they who were likely to be the links in the chain of health-knowledge from generation to generation and thus responsible for the health of the nation. Similarly, they were the re-producers of the nation themselves and thus should they fail to monitor their own health, they would be unfit mothers, either emotionally or physically.<sup>47</sup> As has been said, the small style camps of the Sunlight League worked to acclimatise the girls to the domestic environment, as well as promoting a sense of sisterhood and common understanding. Cora however, it must be pointed out, was not a mother herself and this was reflected in her belief that girls at camp and at the schools she spoke at were faced with the option of raising a family or of contributing in a meaningful way to society - these being the qualifiers of worthy citizenship for a woman.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, the importance of teaching health to girls who were facing a potentially childless future lay in the fact that could these women look after their own health, they would not be a burden to their families. Independence was clearly a requirement for the childless woman and ironically, an unfulfilled requirement in much of Cora's own life. However, the focus on the child-bearing potential of girls was indicative of the wider understanding of the gendered role of women at this time, especially with regards to eugenics. Healthy women, resulted in healthy children, where the specific health of the man appeared beyond the scope of the equation, unless he was found under the label 'child'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>On 'maternal feminism' see Woods.

<sup>48</sup>And this it will be remembered, had been the problem for Cora as an artist, in that she did not have children and was not (she believed) contributing to society as a whole through her painting, and thus decided to turn to a more visible role within the community.

<sup>49</sup>The father was required to be genetically sound, but as such his bodily health was not centred in discussions of reproduction in the same way that women's were. Philippa Mein Smith has noted that within the discourses

The discourse of eugenics specifically worked to embed women within the socially constructed role of breeder, where eugenics itself became a language of mothering and enforced heterosexuality for women. The gap through which women could escape was in the role of health activist - in a sense becoming the 'mother' to the children and sick of the nation as a whole, as Cora did. Furthermore, within the imperialist discourse of eugenics the enforcement of the rightness of a lack of child-bearing by these women manifested in the explicit oppression of the poor and the racialised and medicalised other. These women placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy of motherhood by determining who could and could not breed in an ideology which they were themselves above. The mental defective and the physically inferior were burdened with the role of 'other' to justify the superiority of white middle-class women within the wider patriarchy. Such women claimed, in the name of eugenics, that certain individuals were not to breed as such breeding would pollute the nation and the race.<sup>50</sup> In a sense these women broke free of their gendered role, but retained their femininity by oppressing other women. While Cora was on the periphery of such manifestations of imperialist eugenics, she did focus on women as potential saviours of the race as mothers, which saw her in line with the prevailing attitudes of the time. So in a sense, Cora's camps were enforcing the dominant discourse.

From a different point of view to that given above, it can in fact be seen that Cora's camps were to a degree emancipatory and subversive with respect to the established role of women - or at least more complex in regards to norms, than it might at first appear. Cora was attacked for her continued preference for girls at camps in the newspaper, to which she replied that should funds permit, boys camps would be run too, and that moreover, boys were already provided for by the Y. M. C. A. and Heritage camps.<sup>51</sup> Cora believed that boys had more ready access to the outdoors, whereas their sisters were required to learn domestic roles in a domestic setting which for Cora was bad simply because it stopped girls from benefitting from

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surrounding child health in the first half of the twentieth century, specifically that surrounding the Plunket Movement, 'baby' was always male. Mein Smith, p.1.

<sup>50</sup>For a discussion of white women's involvement in the eugenics movement in New Zealand, see Wanhalla.

<sup>51</sup>In 1936 Dr McIntyre had written to the Press complaining that the public was unhappy with Health Stamp funds going towards a camp for girls only, Cora defended her position and attempted to make it clear that this was not representative of an anti-boys feeling on the Sunlight League's part. Cora Wilding Papers [1.9] [draft correspondence] From Cora to Editor, 27th Oct. 1936. Macmillan Brown Library.



the outdoors - from nature and beauty, for physical and mental well-being. I suspect that for Cora an emphasis on the girl-child reflected her ideas regarding both the holistic nature of health, and the idea that women were left with little to keep them occupied when involved in a somewhat stifling 'society life'. At the very least she would have hoped to be able to give the girls an understanding of the benefits of self-expression, and some tools with which to counter the repressive role for women within the social order. These girls, should they have failed to understand the importance of 'self' in their respective lives, would have been looking at potential mental ill-health and emotional instability. This would have reflected badly in their parenting skills but would also have limited their citizenship potential, as not all women were to be mothers in Cora's understanding of the future (and as we have already seen, democracy itself was considered a healthy form of self-expression). Either way, girls needed to know how to express themselves in a socially-acceptable/healthy way - not through psycho-somatic disorders. Society at large, was content to locate women in the home, raising children and having little engagement with the 'public sphere', and this is where the Sunlight League as a whole can be seen to reflect the pro-women stance of many of its members (a stance which was mixed with eugenics, but also overrode that ideology) in that the ideal of female-citizenship as understood by the League, *necessitated* that women existed beyond the ideological confines of the home for the well-being of the democratic state. Cora's taking of girl children on camp then, was in line with the ideologies surrounding girls as mothers-to-be, but was also at odds with those ideologies in that girls were treated as potential citizens first and foremost, who needed to know about the League of Nations, and who needed to be able to express themselves and recognize their role as contributors to society in a way which reflected the democratic state as Cora understood it. Women were clearly seen as the nobler of the race for Cora, but they were viewed as having a potential beyond the role of mother, which clearly reflected the ideals of womanhood held by the 'first wave feminists', that had in turn won women the vote.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Within the Sunlight League, Cora had been careful to stipulate in the constitutions as they were drawn up, that at least one member on the board must be a mother, and that there must be at least a specified number of women in positions of authority. This illustrates Cora's feminist belief that women had important contributions to make to the running of society as women. Regarding the Sunlight League Executive committee, the constitution was drawn up to read '... and one mother of a family. (At least two members of this increased Executive Committee shall be women).' Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.7] 'Annual Reports' [misc.] 'Sunlight League Rules and Regulations'. Macmillan Brown Library. A similar consideration was made for the Ford Milton Home. See Cora Wilding Papers [1.22] [misc.] 'suggested alterations to Sunlight League Constitution'. Macmillan Brown Library.

The situating of the figure within the landscape, as a body located within a discourse of place, had implications for constructions of identity. Health camps worked within the discourses of nationalism and imperialism in two ways. The most obvious of these ways lay in the focus health camps placed on the growing of youth with the intention of creating strong defenders of the nation and empire, which placed girls in the position of mothers-in-the-making and boys in the role of defenders-of-the-nation. This was the simplest of the two ways in which camps engaged with the wider discourses, the other, while being related to the first involved the ideologies of place and bodies as has already been touched upon. Health camps worked to take the children out of the cities and into the country, emancipating them from the industrial and urban landscape in the name of health and well-being (which is also an important aspect of the camps), but they also worked to take children back to a setting that allowed them to develop national characteristics.<sup>53</sup> In pre-eugenic thinking, man was determined by his environment and it was simply that environment, or land, which led to racial types. Just as ideas regarding a national style within the arts had relied on the landscape for expression, so too did ideas regarding a national type of wo/man. Thus while health camps were taking place western-world wide, specifically to heighten the racial/national assets of the human stock that had been lost by a lack of engagement with the land in favour of industrialisation and progressively white-collar labour, in New Zealand as well as in other colonial lands, health camps represented the chance to assert a national type of one's own - to prove one's right to land in the face of wars which threatened occupation as well as in the face of a native, 'indigenous' population. Paradoxically, while I see health camps as representative of attempts to create inalienable ownership rights to the landscape, which can be interpreted as an attempt at gaining a national identity for future New Zealanders, the prevailing ideologies present in New Zealand saw the landscape considered in terms of an antipodean British landscape which in turn meant that the unification of children with land was at one and the same time also an act of imperialism.

Throughout the wider discourse regarding health, Cora explicitly considered the Maori as a race to be in its traditional state a superior form of the human species, which placed it on an

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<sup>53</sup>The establishment of the Youth Hostels Movement itself, led by Schirrmann and brought to New Zealand by Cora, reflected this reaction against the ills present in urban living. Crookes, p.7.

even footing with the Ancient Greeks with their love of out-door exercise. The Maori were considered to be an advanced type of 'native' from the time of early New Zealand settlement, and as such Cora was merely latching hold of an already established construction of the Maori when she compared them to the Ancient Greeks for their robust physique. This idealised construction of the 'Ancient' Maori however, was appropriated by Cora for use in the discourses surrounding Pakeha identity.<sup>54</sup> As Sara Ahmed explained, the 'tanned' body has the privilege of signifying a morally clean white body, but the black body, as racial signifier, indicates the 'infectability' of being black.<sup>55</sup> Cora's understanding of skin-colour on the other hand, saw the 'brown' body of the Maori used by the League as the token symbol of bodily health rather than disease. The reason for the construction of the 'brown' Maori as the ideal of physical health lay in the perceived out-door lifestyle which led to the race of undefeated warriors: 'brown' skin read as a people who lived outdoors under the sun and the sun was as we have seen, health-giving. Furthermore, the Maori were far from being the 'ebony black' of other racialised groups and thus their skin was not seen as being such an indicator of physiological difference. Moreover, this preference for distinguishing the Maori in terms of a tanned race rather than a black one, represented the construction of New Zealand as a (geographical) replica of Britain and thus according to the rules of pre-eugenic evolution, similar national types should have emerged in both lands.<sup>56</sup> The Maori thus had to be a tanned European to enforce the imperialist understanding of New Zealand, and in turn, the Maori could be appropriated into narratives supporting the ideal of a national type and used to encourage a healthy lifestyle led out of doors. All of this focus on the skin saw the tanning of the nation's children not to just represent the health of a recently exposed and thus strengthened skin, but also understood tanning in terms of ingesting the land, where nationalism was constructed in terms of a specific quality of light within New Zealand at this time, which was also reflected in the ideologies surrounding nationalist and regionalist landscape painting. A New Zealand tan represented the specific absorption of New Zealand

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<sup>54</sup>One of the characteristics of American culture in the late nineteenth century was a nostalgia for ideals of past societies. This preference for the Greek and Maori ideal for living exhibited by Cora and the Sunlight League is likely to be a part of this. Green, p.17.

<sup>55</sup>Ahmed, p.58.

<sup>56</sup>This type of understanding of New Zealand comes through in Macmillan Brown's *Utopias*, see pp.111-3 of this thesis.

light, and was written in the body of the nation's children through their attendance at health camps.<sup>57</sup>

Although it was common for both summer and health camps alike to re-name the members of a camp with reference to a theme, Cora's camps were a little different from other New Zealand camps in that they made recourse to Maori culture. The use of Maori imagery was reflective of Cora's understanding of a national identity, in that the Maori were an integral part of New Zealand, and specifically the part of New Zealand culture which made it unique.<sup>58</sup> Cora wrote in a draft for a radio talk, 'There is no need for us New Zealanders to borrow greatly from Red Indian lore and names, nor from those wonderfully told jungle tales from India, we have great wealth to draw upon from our own Maori Legends.'<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Cora believed that 'the culture of every nation must arise out of its background' which was an idea taken from Cowan and Pomare, and thus the stories of other nations were irrelevant to New Zealanders and their developing sense of nationhood - the jungle tales being the stories used at the Scout camps, and the Red Indian names and stories being used at American camps.<sup>60</sup> New Zealand then, needed its own identity through stories and names, different to those used at the other camps and rather than embracing a British identity, explicitly at least, Cora turned to the indigenous culture of the Maori. The Sunlight League emblem involved the appropriation of the legend of Maui, who snared the sun so that it would travel slower across the sky to allow wo/mankind the benefit of its (for the Sunlight League version) health-giving rays. Cora herself designed the Maori carvings to be used at Te Wai Pounamu Girls' College, and as has been noted, believed that the Maori were at once paintable and promising of a worthy contribution to New Zealand art as artists in their own right.<sup>61</sup> Cora frequently wrote to Johannes Andersen asking advice regarding the authenticity of images and the

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<sup>57</sup>As well as through their involvement in outdoor sport and open-air classrooms ; In this way children were intended to embody the natural abundance of the land. Similar ideas about land and identity are discussed in relation to Canada in the 1920s in Katie Pickles' article on the touring of English Schoolgirls. K. Pickles, 'Exhibiting Canada : Empire, Migration and the 1928 English Schoolgirl Tour' *Gender, Place, Culture*, Vol.7 No.1, 2000, pp.81-96, esp. pp.89-90.

<sup>58</sup>Of colonial women in New Zealand, Philippa Wilson has written that the appropriation of indigenous culture by Pakeha was a way of acquiring authenticity as New Zealanders with a separate identity to that of the British. P. J. Wilson, pp.184-188.

<sup>59</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] [misc.]. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Cora designed the school chapel alter cross, the vases and candlesticks using Maori motifs. Cora Wilding Papers [4.5] [box 1] [misc.]. Macmillan Brown Library.

appropriateness of Maori names for camps and plays.<sup>62</sup> Maori songs were performed by Sunlight League Camp children at the fund-raising Garden Parties, and those Maori children who attended Sunlight League Camps performed Maori dances for the other girls around camp fires.<sup>63</sup> All of which would seem to point to the Pakeha appropriation of Maori culture for their own ends in an act of linguistic colonisation. It seems however, that while other New Zealand camps were mainly for Pakeha children, Cora willingly took Maori children on camp - photographs show Maori within the groups, and obviously they were attending camp if Maori songs were performed by the children. This then, adds another dimension to Cora's use of Maori naming within the context of the camps. She was looking to unite the races in the land which they both were to inhabit but also to make Christchurch children, most of whom would have never seen a Maori, aware of the other - 'awareness' for Cora, and the consequent 'understanding', being the path to peace and inter-racial harmony. This type of belief in harmonious inter-relation is a matrixial understanding of a world which is fulfilled in democratic peace. In her own way, Cora was working towards a sense of bi-cultural nationalism for the children of New Zealand.

In a more general way, naming at camp represented a temporary distancing from the reality of everyday life - indicative of the 'holiday' from the urban life itself. In Cora's camps, the 'camp mother', of other New Zealand camps, was the 'Matua' of the Sunlight League; the camp 'attendants' the 'Mimihau' and the children divided into 'Hapu'. The camps held by Elizabeth Gunn made recourse to similar naming procedures, but relied on the military for their source, where Gunn herself was the camp 'commandante'. This at once reflected the training Gunn had had in the military in the Great War and what may be a thwarted military career, as well as representing the general concern with children's bodies as potential nation defenders - many children's organisations took on a military persona.<sup>64</sup> Cora, explicitly avoided the use of

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<sup>62</sup>Cora also wrote to a Mr McDonald with concern over the meaning of the figure she was going to use in a design for Te Waipounamu as the Rev. McWilliams was worried that it may have been a representation of an evil Maori spirit. Cora Wilding Papers [4.1] [correspondence] From McDonald to Cora, '24/6/27'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>63</sup>'We had our first campfire last night, and the children loved it, and recited and sang and danced in neat formation and the two dear little Maori girls ended it with quite an exciting haka which was the item of the evening.' Cora Wilding Papers [4.2] [correspondence] From Cora to Mrs Wilding, Jan 10th. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>64</sup>Although it may be accurate to suggest that Gunn had a thwarted military career which is signified in her turn to the running of health camps, the same argument that I have used here for Cora - that Cora's move to 'health' was a change in focus, rather than a break from her aesthetic interests which in turn saw her retain her

military customs or names at her camps, preferring Maori names because 'a requirement of childhood [is] fantasy[and] make believe [so it is] fitting to turn to Maoris[sic]'.<sup>65</sup> While this does indicate an opinion of the Maori people which saw them as the exoticised other and thus worthy of being made into fiction (Cora's opinions regarding the Italians while she was abroad painting displayed similar imperialistic aesthetic assumptions) it also indicates a belief in the richness of Maori culture, as well as illustrating the psychological motivations behind the running of the camps. The Scouts movement, in which Cora trained as a leader before embarking on the running of health camps, utilised names which were brought with the movement from overseas, such as 'brown owl' and 'mother rabbit'.<sup>66</sup> According to Leslie Paris in her article 'The Adventures of Peanut and Bo', naming 'ritualized new relationships and ways of thinking about community and kinship outside traditional bounds...', in other words, it represented a certain move away from the external social order. Camp rituals also worked to demarcate a different social setting.<sup>67</sup> However, Paris' account of the naming in American camps (where the naming was as much a product of inter-camper relations as it was of intentional labelling by organisers) did not quite allow for the naming as used in the Sunlight League camps where the intention was to take the child away from the familiar, but to also instill camp routines and rituals which would be of use for health in the outside world, not merely as a demarcator of a different space. Although naming did work to give the children at camps a different role to that of the child in the wider world, to Cora, the purpose was to encourage children's creative play and imagination - in a way, to create a setting where life became a work of art, rather than the everyday grind of being a child.

While place plays an important role in identity formation, and the running of health camps and Keep-Fit Classes by the Sunlight League saw the League engage with ideals for the self as belonging to the nation/Empire on a grand scale, the simple act of taking girl-children and

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femininity within wider discourses - could be equally applied to Gunn, where I would suggest that a re-construction of Gunn's life could also see her 're-empowered' in this regard within the historical narrative. In turn the description of her as having had a 'thwarted military career' would become a misleading and unsightful observation.

<sup>65</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.14] 'Sunlight League - Health Camps: Equipment etc. [misc.] 'Staff Chapter 4 cont.'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>66</sup> Wilding Family : ARC1989.124 Box 39 Folder 184 Item 175. Canterbury Museum.

<sup>67</sup> L. Paris, 'The Adventures of Peanut and Bo : Summer Camps and Early-Twentieth-Century American Girlhood', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.12 No.4, Winter 2001, pp.47-76, pp.60-61.

women out of the home and cities and into the open-air, also had an impact on potential identity formation for women as citizens gendered feminine. So long as bodies are ideologically associated with women, a consideration of the placement of the body within a text (or a landscape) is a relevant and in a way necessary consideration, for a feminist reading of that text/scape.<sup>68</sup> The corporeality of health camps in general, but specifically of those run by the Sunlight League, as well as its Keep-Fit Classes, is illuminating in this capacity in that space and place have been demarcated in certain ways historically that allow for the act of taking children into the landscape to have diverse political motivations, especially when it concerns the taking of girl-children into the landscape.<sup>69</sup> In this way place, self, space and body - but moreover the interactions between them - are central to understanding constructions of the gendered subject historically.

Camps were intended as a means to take the child away from the urban environment which was understood to be a threat to well-being, and to take the child away from the home, so as to replace the mother with 'professionals' who would build the child up - for the Sunlight League camps this meant in total, not just physically. On the one hand these camps offered a break for the child, and a chance to develop new understandings of the self, (whether that was in terms of rigid military-like disciplinary models which prioritised the sentient self over the corporeal, where the body was proof of intellectual mastery or otherwise, or where the body and mind and soul were taught to be equal and free players within the harmonious life of the symbolic democracy) and on the other hand they offered a break for the mother - Cora was especially in favour of this aspect of organised camps.<sup>70</sup> This in itself was considered healthy, in that developing theories of psychology saw the relationship between mother and child fraught with difficulties - too distant and the child developed feelings of unwantedness, too close and the child failed to develop an individual sense of self; either way, the child became

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<sup>68</sup>Denise Riley wrote 'In a strong sense the body is a concept, and so is hardly intelligible unless it is read in relation to whatever else supports it and surrounds it.' D. Riley, *'Am I that Name?'*, Houndmills, 1998, p.104.

<sup>69</sup>With regards to the Boy Scouts Movement, John Springhall wrote 'And the Boy Scouts inherited the pastoral 'myth' of open air woodcraft, with its conviction that Nature symbolised the greatest available purity; together with the paternalistic longing for class harmony and collaboration in rural sports evident in Christian Socialism.' This is likely to be of relevance to Cora's health camps as well. J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, London, 1977, p.54.

<sup>70</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.16] [box 1] [talk] 'Address to West Melton Women's Guild 16 Oct. 1943'. Macmillan Brown Library.

psychologically stunted. In this way, the home became the site of psychological threat, just as the city became the site of disease and decay. The camp then, acted as a chance for the damage done by both the city and the home to be rectified. Where the 'home' was clearly deemed feminine, so too was the city, considered as it was effeminate and poisonous to a male virility linked to muscular christianity. In this way, children were to be emancipated from both of the polluting aspects of the feminine. This is interesting because the girl-child, as mother-to-be, was ideologically located within the home and yet Cora's camps worked to emancipate specifically girl-children from the home and the city - girl-children were emancipated from a polluting femininity. Paradoxically girl-children were symbolically freed from the societal role of mother by being taken away from the domestic setting, but at the same time they were taught that as girls they had responsibilities as potential mothers-to-be. It must also be pointed out that it was understood at this time that nature would do no harm to either sex as gender was a natural distinction, rather than a social one, therefore taking children into the natural setting worked to enhance their naturally gendered dispositions. The focus on taking girl-children on camp - often at the expense of boys, while it has been argued reflected an awareness on Cora's part that boys were harder to manage than girls, appears in fact to be an attempt at taking girls away from the gendered notion of mother and instilling the notion of citizen (albeit also gendered) in its place.<sup>71</sup> This symbolically manifested in the taking of girls away from their 'natural' setting, and placing them in the 'neutral' setting of nature. Moreover, for the Sunlight League, camp offered a chance to experience the world in a natural and harmonious state, where beauty could be experienced at first hand - this in itself was somewhat subversive in that girl-children were being taught to experience beauty, when generally women were expected to embody it rather than experience it for themselves.

Similarly Cora's Keep Fit classes, run for young women on the roofs of local city buildings on Saturday afternoons for a few months in 1933 and again from June 9th to July 19th 1941, were run with the same intended emancipatory power for the older girl, as health camps had been for the younger.<sup>72</sup> The Keep Fit classes were initially intended for unemployed girls in 1933 and for working girls who were exposed to the dark, unhealthy offices of the city in the

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<sup>71</sup>Patricia Sargison observed that girls between 10-12 years were less likely to be bed-wetters than boys. Sargison, *Notable Women in New Zealand Health*, p.51.

<sup>72</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.4] 'Sunlight League Gardening and Keep Fit Hapu' [Report] 'Gardening Branch of the Sunlight League July 1942-July 1943'. Macmillan Brown Library.



later years. In the report for the 2nd Annual Meeting of the Sunlight League for the Year Ending May 9th 1933, it was written,

In our city to-day[sic] many unoccupied girls have become apathetic about exercise. Because lowered vitality leads to incapacity and failure, as physical fitness produces efficiency and increased chance of finding and holding jobs, the League proposes holding physical culture classes.<sup>73</sup>

In these classes young women were encouraged to express themselves freely through dance arrangements, in a sense acknowledging the existence of their own bodies and taking responsibility for the well-being of their human souls. Miss Macmillan Brown helped with the teaching of the dances and Miss Doreen Hight assisted with the music. The reason behind the location of the classes, gendered ideologies aside, lay primarily in the Sunlight League's belief in the need to exercise in the sunlight to gain the most benefit for the health of the organism. Because Christchurch had a smog problem even in the 1930s, it was considered a good idea to exercise above the smog level. Because of this, Mr Hay provided his roof in March 1933 for classes which centred on 'sunbathing, physical exercises, and folk-dancing'.<sup>74</sup> These first physical culture classes run by the Sunlight League, ceased in July of 1933 due to poor turn-out and were not to resume again until 1941.<sup>75</sup> However, the modesty of young women probably also came into play in the choosing of location, as would have the opinions of the Christchurch people. The naming of 'Keep Fit' for these classes, was again representative of the Sunlight League's holistic approach to health in that the whole being was in need of fitness, and as we shall see, dance was considered to be one of the most effective forms of self-expression, as well as being for Clive Bell, the most effective means for the unaesthetic to experience beauty.

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<sup>73</sup>Girls then, needed to be fit so that they could be employable - notably in the People's League of Health Pamphlets discussed earlier, it was the boy who needed health and vitality for employment. Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] 'Sunlight League of New Zealand 2nd Annual Meeting Year Ending May 9th 1933'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>74</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.1] March 8th 1933. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid. ; In August of 1933 Miss Peggy Holmes consented to provide ballet classes for the unemployed girls as a replacement for the roof-top exercises - perhaps a more acceptably feminine pursuit. Cora Wilding Papers [1.1] Aug 7th 1933. Macmillan Brown Library.

Linda J. Tomko has identified the prospect within the phenomenon of organised female dancing, for women to assert their role within the burgeoning professionalism of the early twentieth century as well as demonstrating their political agency.<sup>76</sup> Tomko's area of inquiry was specifically the organised folk-dances held by the Girls' Branch of the Public Schools Athletic League in Central Park, New York, but the implications of the existence of these park fetes also hold true for Cora's use of dance in the women's 'Keep Fit' classes as well as for the dancing component of Health Camp activities.<sup>77</sup> Girl-children dancing in open spaces, according to Tomko, reflected the lack of<sup>8</sup> adequate recreational areas provided for children and young adults and in turn amounted to a critique of urban-living. In the New Zealand context the urban situation was somewhat less invasive in relation to life-styles, with a focus on open spaces and parks coming from the Christchurch Beautification Society, but it is possible to read the very existence of health camps as an urban critique, as well as the holding of Keep Fit classes on rooftops.<sup>78</sup>

The use of dance as a means to emancipate the female form, proved to offer a foot in the door of professionalism for women, with women beginning to take authority over their own bodies, as well as the bodies of others (largely women and children). In New Zealand this was a nationwide movement which saw the establishment of many loosely bound organisations which focused on the female body.<sup>79</sup> Physiotherapy (or massage) obviously focussed on the body, and was part of the rise in female professionalism regarding the body in that proportionately far more women trained in and practiced massage in these years than did men - Cora and Mary McLean of course, being among them. Ideas regarding physiotherapy also focussed on light and dance, with the Margaret Morris Movement seeing dance as being the ultimate means to healing the cripple, where Margaret Morris and Mary Wigman became leaders in the

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<sup>76</sup>See L. J. Tomko, 'Fete Accompli : gender, "folk-dance", and Progressive-era political ideals in New York City' in S. L. Foster ed., *Corporealities : Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, London, 1996, pp.155-176.

<sup>77</sup>In this context, 'dance' is used to refer to any intentionally expressive and aesthetic bodily movements, which includes gymnastics, folk-dancing, callisthenics etc.

<sup>78</sup>For a discussion of the Christchurch Beautification Society see T. Strongman, *City Beautiful : The First 100 years of the Christchurch Beautifying Association*, Christchurch, 1999.

<sup>79</sup>The Health and Beauty Movement started in 1937 and involved dance. S. Coney, 'Health and Beauty Movement' in Else ed., *Women Together*, pp.267-9 ; The Young Women's Christian Association (Y. W. C. A.) ran gymnastics in Auckland from 1886 and progressively in other centres. 'Young Women's Christian Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand 1878 - ' in Else ed., *Women Together*, pp.125-128, p.126.

therapeutic dance movement.<sup>80</sup> The American park fetes discussed by Tomko, illustrate this point in that Helen Tamiris was another successful leader in dance. A well-known choreographer in the 1920s, she travelled abroad to collect folk-dances to bring back to the American girls to perform in what Tomko described as an abridged and de-contextualised form.<sup>81</sup> In this way, women like Tamiris, as well as Cora (with respect to Maori culture as much as to her use of established folk-dances) appropriated the culture of the other in an imperialistic fashion to substantiate their own claims to authority within the patriarchy, not unlike what happened to the 'lower classes' with regards to the eugenics movement, or the use of the 'native' within the artistic discourse.

The most relevant observation in relation to this study, made by Tomko, lies in the quasi subversive nature of park fetes geographically. By this, I refer to the presence of American girls in the public for display, a phenomenon which saw them transgress the ideology of the separate spheres, but at the same time saw them re-enact and thus re-enscribe gender into their bodies in other ways.<sup>82</sup> This is relevant to this discussion of Cora Wilding because it appears that the running of her health camps allowed for the same process. For Tomko, the girls in the park were gaining a sort of equality in that they were now on display in a way that mimicked the display of boys involved in athletic competitions, but that very display re-inforced gendered norms in that fetes relied on group work rather than individual performance, and were assessed in different ways accordingly. Cora's organised Keep Fit classes followed suit, with an emphasis on team work, or at the very least the girls were partnered rather than singled out. It seems in fact that singling any girl out was specifically frowned upon in Cora's classes. Notes on how to run these classes explicitly recommend the use of the plural 'we' rather than 'you' in an attempt to avoid the embarrassment which would result in the focus on a single female body. 'Let's all hold up heads [.] Say we are good [, ] we are bad[, ] not you ... and you ... ' .<sup>83</sup> This type of preference for a concern with the over-all running of the classes and achievements of the girls as a whole rather than as individuals, indicates the ideal Cora was putting forward

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<sup>80</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.7] [booklet] The aesthetic in the treatment of Paralysis. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>81</sup>Tomko, p.167.

<sup>82</sup>Caroline Daley has discussed the gendering of public recreational spaces in Auckland. C. Daley, 'A Gendered Domain : Leisure in Auckland, 1890-1940' in C. Daley and D. Montgomerie eds., The Gendered Kiwi, Auckland, 1999, pp.87-111.

<sup>83</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.7] [book] '1940 P.T.'. Macmillan Brown Library.

for citizenship (the Sunlight League Health Camp motto may be enlightening at this point : All for Each and Each for All).<sup>84</sup> The ideal of democracy came through in the ideals of dance as explained by Morris, who believed that for the cripple it was important that the specific abilities of each member of the group was allowed for - a member may not have had arms, therefore their role in the dance did not involve the arm-movements that other members may have performed.<sup>85</sup> Again the importance here, was in not singling out individuals for their inability, but in allowing them to express themselves as they personally could, rather than expecting them to adhere to a norm to which they continually fell short. The idea was, moreover, to not draw attention to the weak organ, but to work the whole body which was indicative of a positive outlook on life - looking to the solution, rather than focussing on the problem.<sup>86</sup>

Geographically it would appear that park fetes placing girls on view within the cityscape was a subversive act - crossing gendered boundaries - but rather the placing of these girls in an essentially 'pastoral' setting, worked to neutralise the girls within that natural environment. Leslie Paris has dealt with the subversive potential of location when she identified the tendency for Summer camps to allow for a different understanding of self - beyond the confines of gender-roles, because they were held in an alternative setting to the everyday urban lives of the children who attended. But even these camps, as subversive as they may seem, still took girls into natural settings, away from the public gaze, and upon their return they were intentionally subsumed back into the gendered existence of being a girl. It is hard to identify much of a subversive nature regarding the crossing of gendered boundaries, geographic or otherwise in either the Sunlight League Camps or in the holding of Keep Fit classes on rooftops. At best there appears to be a mixing of subversive and enforcing elements with regards to dominant ideologies. These types of elements I identified earlier with regards to the taking of

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<sup>84</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.22] [book] 'Sunlight Camp League 1936 Log Book', p.2. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>85</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.7] [booklet] 'The Aesthetic in the Treatment of Paralysis : An Article by Margaret Morris reprinted from *The Cripples Journal* Jan 1928', p.7. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>86</sup>In a way this was the driving force behind Cora's preference for girl-children from acceptable but unfortunate families, whose fathers were away fighting for the nation and Empire. An understanding of heredity led to this preference, but rather than indicating a case of Cora 'missing the point' when it came to the purpose of health camps, it indicated her belief in the helping of the whole body - in this case the whole national body - thus rather than focussing on the weaknesses in society, she sought to work towards the solution, being of course, better citizenship.

girl-children away from domestic settings to teach them how to be good citizens, when that notion of a good citizen was inherently gendered, as well as taking girls back to nature, when nature has long been linked with the feminine. All of which appears to hinge on a democratic understanding of harmony while reflecting a naturalised understanding of humanity. Cora's girls dancing on rooftops, similarly, was at once subversive in that it drew attention to women and their bodies in the central business district of Christchurch New Zealand, but it also enforced the dominant ideas about women by ensuring that they were out of public view.

While it is true to say that Cora's Keep Fit Classes were indicative of a wider concern with poor breathing and inferior posture, both of which resulted in the inability of major internal organs to function properly (their ability to express themselves within the democracy of the body was impaired by unnatural structures), they also clearly worked in line with the ideals of the Sunlight League, displaying in fact, in a compact form, the way certain facets were seen to interrelate within the self. For Margaret Morris and Rollier, the emphasis in healing a crippled body was in the engagement of the mind, which worked best through a sort of self expression through the body. Both Cora and Morris recommended allowing the students/cripples to create their own movements for their psychological betterment.<sup>87</sup> For Rollier this was simply the use of craft - basket weaving as a means of feeling a renewed sense of worth. For Morris, and Cora's use of Morris's ideas in her Keep Fit classes, the mind, body and soul were required to work in harmony - which was an ideal taken from Ancient Greek culture to a greater or lesser degree. Morris wrote in her article 'The Aesthetic in the Treatment of Paralysis', 'Unless there is *active interest in the movements*, you will not get the maximum nervous stimuli, and therefore there will be less chance of success in getting a perfect understanding between the muscle and the mind'.<sup>88</sup> In a way, this simply reflected the ideals of medicine in the previous century which had seen mental illness in terms of a body and mind which had slipped out of alignment - a slow, regular physical activity was the treatment prescribed to offer a chance for the body and mind to regain their equal footing. In the case of the cripple, it was necessary to re-align the body and mind because the *body* had become un-responsive to the will

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<sup>87</sup>Morris wrote 'The value of this [Individual composition] is psychological but not entirely; I have already mentioned how those suffering from physical disability, feeling themselves part of an artistic whole, and able to do something they had not dreamt possible, gain hope and confidence.' Cora Wilding Papers [4.7] [booklet] 'The Aesthetic in the Treatment of Paralysis', p.11. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p.1.

of the mind, but the same type of idea appears to be at the root of both. The aim of Morris's teaching was to '... restore lack of harmony and design, and to reform the deformed body', which has implications for the understanding of the role of the body within society in that the body's role is not to function as a reproductive organism, but in a purely beautiful capacity.<sup>89</sup> A focus on beauty in and of itself as a goal for life, which was the focus in Cora's ideas on aesthetics, worked to release the female body from the role of reproducer - as mother pure and simple, and thus from the naturalising and patriarchal emphasis in much eugenic thought.

Beauty for Morris, clearly equalled health and in this I see the results of a similar understanding of the Beauty of Health that came forward in the works of Vernon Lee and in the apparent transgression of boundaries which allowed Cora Wilding to aestheticise health within the Sunlight League. Morris believed that all involved in massage should ideally have had a training in aesthetics so that beauty could be taught to the broken body to again make it whole. Morris wrote 'When the study of aesthetics in relation to movement forms part of the training of *every* masseuse and medical gymnast, widespread results will be possible in the treatment of paralysis and other conditions, by the combination of the aesthetic with medical knowledge.'<sup>90</sup> Morris engaged in a discourse of professionalism which required the professional to have training in both art and medicine - one must remember that while aesthetics has largely been discarded as a leading ideology or philosophical branch in its own right, it too was a new form of knowledge which was tussling with other forms of knowledges for dominance over the bodies of the people - and as has been mentioned, this discourse of aesthetics could take a masculine or a feminine turn, the former manifesting in an elitist aesthetics of art and artists, the latter mutating into a democratic aesthetics of the social and humane. This division is of course loosely represented in the structure of this thesis. Dance offers the most obvious sort of illustration for the attempt at aestheticising the everyday - or at least an understanding of health which relied on beauty - the structure of the dance and the dancers was itself significant form, and this significant form was understood to heal. While the activities on the rooftops of Christchurch buildings were likely to be loosely based on the ideas coming across in the Margaret Morris movement, so too were the 'games' run at Health Camps - Folk Dances and

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<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

German Clap Dances were held at the Brighton Camp by Josephine Stevens.<sup>91</sup> Greek 'held' positions were used at both, with the intention of replicating the beautiful forms of the Greek statues, which very obviously reflected the ideas of Anstruther-Thomson who believed that works of art were beneficial because they inspired an empathy within the body for the physical balance represented in the art.<sup>92</sup> In Greek 'held' postures, one was required to *become* the work of art outright.

Beauty and citizenship then, were the key elements in Cora's running of health camps and the holding of keep-fit classes. The Beauty of Health was an ideology that allowed for Cora's agency as an historical subject within wider narratives, but as has been said, this discourse of aesthetics was not an understanding held by all, or even many, of Cora's contemporaries in Christchurch. Tennant has located a divisive period within the health camp movement in 1936, when the Federation of Health Camps was formed and health camps moved away from being informal organisations run by women, to being permanent sites overseen by officials. This change in structure holds great explanatory power with regard to the experiences of the Sunlight League as an organiser of children's health camps, but more importantly, to Cora's experiences as founding member of the League. 1936 is the year when Cora left the running of Sunlight League Health Camps to other members of the League, finding herself to be at odds with the new, official measures involved in the Health Camp Movement. As we shall see, she perceived the very heart of what the League stood for post-1936, to be at odds with her own ideals; the Sunlight League had progressively become uninterested in the ideals of citizenship and Beauty.

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<sup>91</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [4.7] [book] '1940 P.T.'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Chapter Six:

The Art of Harmonious Living  
(1936-1951)

...for of course everybody realises that Miss Wilding is the Sunlight League.

E. Lorna Currie<sup>1</sup>

While the work of the Sunlight League had often engaged in identity construction for New Zealanders - national, Imperial, and gendered constructions of identity - the Sunlight League itself under Cora Wilding, had had a very strong sense of its own identity. At the very formation of the Sunlight League (at which time the League was tentatively called the Sunshine Society), the prospect of amalgamation with the Open-Air School League was put to the council by Dr Bevan-Brown.<sup>2</sup> The prospect was postponed for discussion at a later meeting, but eventually the proposal was discarded as it was considered that the two organisations did not have enough in common and it was feared that the scope of the League's activities would be limited in the eyes of the public should amalgamation take place.<sup>3</sup> Even at this formative stage it was understood that the identity of the League was somewhat different to other existing organisations, even though some of their interests may have overlapped. Three and a half years after the Sunlight League had identified itself as an organisation with unique ideals,

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<sup>1</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [4.1] [correspondence] From E. Lorna Currie to Cora, incomplete, n. d., p.4. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>2</sup> Cora Wilding Papers [1.1] 6th Dec. 1930. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



amalgamation of ideological and organisational bodies was again discussed. The issue of the federation of all health camps running in New Zealand was discussed as early as mid-1934 by the Sunlight League at their June meeting. Cora was again reluctant to see the individuality and freedom of her organisation and its health camps threatened, just as she had been during discussions of the earlier matter of amalgamation with the Open-Air Schools League.

According to the minutes of this first official discussion of the prospect of federation, very little was made of the idea.<sup>4</sup> Dr Crooke dismissed it on the grounds that the Sunlight League as an organisation was too young to federate.<sup>5</sup> Cora had received similar advice from T. D. Harman (of T.D. Harman and Sons, Barristers and Solicitors) in a letter dated 22nd June 1934, recommending refusing the offer of federation because the League was too small with limited resources, as well as representing a body of ideals which would be lost under a larger governing body.<sup>6</sup> Under the belief that Federation would allow for the individuality of the Sunlight League Camps to remain intact (an assurance given by the chairman of the Wellington Children's Health Camp Association), as well as with the prompting of A.G. Paterson (who persuaded Cora that federation would give legitimacy to the work she was doing), the Sunlight League Health Camps eventually became part of the National Federation of Health Camps in 1936. This move reflected the change in government involvement in children's health, which had been foreshadowed by comments made in a letter to Cora in June 1931 by A.J. Stallworthy, in which Stallworthy had described the desirability of co-ordinating the New Zealand Health Camp movement.<sup>7</sup>

Until 1936 the Sunlight League Health Camps had remained under the control of Cora Wilding, who had acted as both Honorary Secretary to the League and Honorary Organiser to the Health Camps until that year. From federation in 1936, the camps became progressively

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 6th July 1934.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> It is likely that Crooke was speaking at the meeting on behalf of this letter ; Cora Wilding Papers [1.8] [correspondence] From T. D. Harman to Cora, 22nd June 1934. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. [correspondence] From Wellington Childrens' Health Camp Association to Cora, 2nd Aug. 1934 ; [correspondence] From A. G. Paterson to Cora, 2nd July 1934 ; [correspondence] From A. J. Stallworthy to Cora, 16th June 1931. Trouble with the Ashburton Branch of the Sunlight League attempting to get Health Stamp funds without the authority of the Sunlight League proper is also likely to have swayed Cora and the League towards federation as federation was a means to controlling not only the running of health camps but also to overseeing the allocation of health stamp funds - this was also of concern to Cora as she felt the South Island was largely overlooked regarding government support of health camps. Cora Wilding Papers [1.1] 25th May 1934. Macmillan Brown Library.

under the control of the Government body, and this represented a huge change in their running and focus. Individual freedom was an important ideological theme for Cora, as this thesis has shown, and the limitations placed upon her and the League through federation, as well as the subsequent change within the League in focus and leadership, ultimately led her to distance herself progressively from the League from 1936, when she excused herself of her duties, and took a painting trip around New Zealand. Cora's drive for creating worthy citizens was mostly left behind with her temporary resignation from League activities, while Federation meant that there was much closer governmental attention being paid to the activities of the League's camps.

Cora's move away from the League in 1936 has been explained largely in terms of growing home responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> According to Mathews, Cora took time away from the League because a family doctor had advised her to take time out for the benefit of her own health.<sup>9</sup> 1936 was also the year that Cora's mother died at the age of eighty-one, and Mathews has described this as an unprecedented shock for Cora.<sup>10</sup> Familial factors would have undeniably been influential in Cora's decision to leave health camp affairs, but it is likely that the changes necessitated by federation also led to changes in the focus of League activities which led to Cora experiencing disempowerment in the running of camps which in turn would have increased her psychological unrest and thus willingness to leave the League. The 'grieving argument' as Mathews has offered it, has overlooked the fact that years earlier Anthony's death had spurred Cora into action, rather than sending her running with tail between legs. Although Cora was a much older woman by the time of her mother's death, and a mother-daughter relationship is often of a different intensity to that of a brother-sister relationship, I believe that a further explanation is required to supplement the grieving argument. I consider there to have been a wider context of growing discontent with League affairs on Cora's part, that led her to leave the League rather than find refuge in it during her grieving. There does appear to have been growing friction between Cora and a few of the key male personalities involved in League affairs. I would, then, identify familial factors as perhaps acting as the catalyst in the decision to leave, but would also locate growing divisions between Cora's ideals for the League and those

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<sup>8</sup> S. K. Wilson, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Mathews, p.136.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

of, say, Dr Currie, as indicating a context that is not to be overlooked when seeking explanations for Cora's move away from the League in 1936.<sup>11</sup>

In a way the nature of the League itself changed in 1936 because the focus after federation lay mainly on the activities of the health camps, at the expense of the other Sunlight League activities. Given that the Health Camp Committee was now getting government funding from an unprecedented success in the 1935/6 Health Stamp Campaign, and the other committees were waning as their objectives were being met, the focus of the League narrowed during this period. Wilson has claimed that the League essentially became a covering organisation for the health camps from 1936, and while this may in fact represent a privileging of the most successful and long-lived aspect of the League, as well as of Cora Wilding herself, it does seem appropriate to distinguish a narrowing of emphasis within the League progressively from the diminishment of Cora's role within it.<sup>12</sup> It is however, important to note that while the health camps were a large part of League activities up to and from 1936, there was also work being done towards other Sunlight League aims and objectives, by other committees within the League. The abatement of the 'smoke nuisance' in Christchurch (the Sunlight League was a member of the National Smoke Abatement Society in Manchester and used their printed material for publicity purposes) was worked towards by the 'Smoke Abatement Committee', and a lot of agitation towards the establishment of a solarium for tubercular cases was also undertaken. Mary McLean, as a representative of the 'Dental and Diet Sub-Committee', although having resigned in September of 1939, worked towards the A1 dental plan in the committee's early years, the introduction of milk in schools, and after her resignation the sub-committee continued aggitating for enquiries to be made into the safety of pasteurisation and chemical use in foodstuffs well into the 1940s. The health camps then, were far from being the sole focus of the League - neither before nor after 1936. The emphasis on Cora and the development of her health camps within League affairs, may simply reflect the availability of archival material pertaining to the League - given that most of the archival material comes directly or indirectly, from Cora, but this change in focus post-1936 also reflected a change in the membership basis of the Sunlight League. By 1936, some of the more influential original

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<sup>11</sup>Sargison considered that both the changes needed because of federation and the death of her mother led Cora to resign from her posts with the League. P. Sargison, 'Wilding, Cora Hilda Blanche' in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* : vol.4 1921-1940, Auckland, 1998, pp. 565-6, p.565.

<sup>12</sup>S. K. Wilson, p.2.

members were dead - Mrs George Rhodes had died in 1931, in 1934 Sir Arthur Dudley Dobson, who had been a driving force, with Cora, behind the Youth Hostels Association Movement had died, Bevan-Brown (Senior) had died in 1934, Prof. Macmillan Brown had died in 1935 as had Margaret Stoddart and Ada Paterson, while David Renfrew White had passed away in 1936, as had Cora's own mother Julia Wilding. The diversity of the interests of the League members and advisors was thus deteriorating and this may also go part way towards explaining the apparent move towards the health camps as the main focus for the Sunlight League's efforts.

It is unclear how long Cora was away from the Sunlight League - it appears that even while she was not involved with the Sunlight League in an official capacity she still remained involved in its workings.<sup>13</sup> In a sense it seems that while Cora no longer wanted to be part of a League which was increasingly abandoning the ideals for which it was established, she still felt responsible for its work. In 1936, while at Lake Pukaki Cora wrote to her mother,

Dr Currie has written telling me about camp affairs, telling me that it was not my business but the business of the [illegible] Committee or Health Camp committee, to have found out the expenses of the various camps - as a matter of fact it was Cecil [McKellar] who asked me to ask Miss Maxwell - and this sheet was shown to all the Matuas of the camp and apparently Mr Osmas[?] and Mr Cutler are annoyed and blame me - Mr Osmas[?] thinks all the camp[s] should all have been paid in a lump sum - Hence Dr Currie's rap on my knuckles during my holiday. He loves exerting authority and I resent it. However it is not going to occur again as I will not work again as Hon Organiser of Health Camp, if my work is to be criticised and [illegible] about as Dr Currie sees fit, and I will not see money belonging to the S. L. thrown about.<sup>14</sup>

Of course Cora was to work again for the men whom she felt gave her little respect or credit as the founding member of the League.

While outside the official workings of the Sunlight League, Cora ran 'Keep Fit Classes' which as the war progressed became the 'Sunlight League Gardening Hapu', who worked the

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<sup>13</sup>Sargison has dated her return to the League as being 1944 when she worked as secretary for a year and then left again in 1945, returning in 1947. Sargison, 'Wilding, Cora Hilda Blanche', p.565.

<sup>14</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [4.2] [correspondence] to Mrs Wilding from Cora Wilding 'Sunday'. Macmillan Brown Library ; Mathews offers a somewhat abridged version of this extract. Mathews, pp.136-7.

grounds at Fownhope, the Wilding family home.<sup>15</sup> Fruit and vegetables, as well as flowers, were delivered to the wives, widows and mothers of soldiers away at war as well as providing for health camps and orphans.<sup>16</sup> The gardens were called the 'Victory' gardens and the work done, while obviously having a real benefit to the families who were provided with food, also worked as a preventative for the mental strain the women in the community were placed under during the war. Cora herself considered these meetings to be important in their capacity to allow women to 'retain their self-respect' by working 'in this very humble way'.<sup>17</sup> These Saturday afternoons proved to bring women together who were suffering from want of anything productive to do while the menfolk were away fighting, and it gave them a chance to engage with nature, as well as 'keeping fit' and doing their bit for the wider community. In a sense this was an instance of the idle rich working to provide for the not-so-idle poor - most of the women involved were from the surrounding area in St Martins, but girls also came to help from the technical college, while the boys from the technical college helped with the digging.<sup>18</sup> With men being the bread-winners, poorer families felt the loss of their husbands and sons far more than did the more well-off families living around the St Martins area in Christchurch. However it is worth noting that flowers were also grown in the gardens and in at least one instance these were provided for a wedding.<sup>19</sup> It appears that as much as for the provision of foods for the deserving poor, these gardens were to be a therapeutic activity for the lady gardeners, as well as allowing for the continuation of a semblance of normality for those more affluent in society - raspberries and cream were given to families as well as flowers - at the other end of the scale of course, tomatoes, potatoes and lettuces were grown and given away.<sup>20</sup> The Gardening Hapu eventually decided to include a small note with the goods delivered explaining the vitamin benefits of the fruit and vegetables as well as advice on how to

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<sup>15</sup>The Keep Fit classes ran for just over a year before turning to gardening in July of 1942. Cora Wilding Papers [1.4] [report] July 1942- July 1943. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, Aug. 2nd 1941. Macmillan Brown Library

<sup>17</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] [talk] 'short talk for Canterbury Women's Club Dec. 1941'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>18</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.4] Sept. 20th 1941. Macmillan Brown Library ; Nov. 9th 1941.

<sup>19</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.4] [correspondence] From Mr and Mrs J. Fielding to Cora, n.d.. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>20</sup>Raspberries and cream were given to F. Mulcock. Cora Wilding Papers [1.4] [correspondence] From F. Mulcock to Cora, 28/12/44. Macmillan Brown Library ; Among the produce grown over the four years the gardens were running were radishes, parsnips, carrots, peas, spinach for babies, silverbeet, leeks, onions, rhubarb, asparagus, lettuces, beans for Britain, flowers and in mid 1945 chives and bushes of blackcurrants were planted.

cook them so that their nutritional value was not overlooked. Thus while the point of these meetings and activities was largely outside of the official workings of the League, health propaganda it seems, was still alive and well.

Just as the taking of girl-children on camp and the teaching of physical culture to young women on rooftops was at best quasi-subversive, so too was the work of the Gardening Hapu. Gardens were at once representative of the pastoral-setting identified as neutralising the woman in a natural and conservative setting, while at the same time gardens - especially formal gardens - worked to resist the potential emancipation of the woman from her traditional role even more in that these gardens featured as little pieces of Britain within the New Zealand landscape. In a way these activities were no more subversive than were the phenomena of garden parties, which the Sunlight League often organised as fund-raising and publicity ventures. As little pieces of Britain ('Fownhope' itself represented a colonising of the Canterbury landscape given that it was the name of the Wilding home in the United Kingdom) these sites were already cultural markers, rather than being culture-free naturescapes. The act of working - labouring in the gardens at Fownhope, established the role of these women as imperial guards in their own right, just as their men were guarding the Empire at war overseas, but this was a feminised type of guarding, as these women were to guard the health of those at home via food - in a sense *maintaining* the bodies which were required for nation-building.

Also during World War Two, Cora ran Sunlight League Working Bees one afternoon every second week at Fownhope. These meetings had originally been run by Cora's mother during the first World War and from 1940-1944 Cora revived the patriotic work.<sup>21</sup> These Bees, rather than being productive in the sense that their output was large and thus the value of their work lay in the number of socks knitted and scarfs woven for the men serving abroad, were again, like the Gardening Hapu, productive in that they provided a forum for women to join together and discuss war-matters that were relevant to their lives - in a way the Bees allowed the women attending to express their fears and concerns, while keeping busy and entertaining

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<sup>21</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.5] 'Sunlight League Working Bee : Patriotic Fund Minutes 1940-1944' [Minutes] May 27th 1940. Macmillan Brown Library.

a feeling of importance.<sup>22</sup> During these Working Bees, relevant articles from the newspapers were discussed as were other topics relevant to the work of the Sunlight League. These included discussions on the articles printed in The Press on the Emergency Prevention Scheme, as well as passages read from the New Order Literature and on radio talks on how to exterminate flies and keep manure.<sup>23</sup> During these Bees, Cora would run physical culture exercises, primarily for the uncramping of knitters' hands, but more-over, to continue in the lines of the philosophy of the Sunlight League - that physical exercise was good for psychological well-being.<sup>24</sup> In this way, I would describe the Sewing Bees and Gardening Hapu as being indicative of morale-boosters for the women in Cora's area as well as working towards encouraging the health of the self of the woman along holistic lines. The intellectual capacity of the woman was to be stimulated by discussions, the physical by the exercises and the psychological by the very act of helping in the wider society - by having a purpose and enacting one's citizenship.<sup>25</sup> Cora wrote regarding the exercises 'All felt that anything which helped them to become fitter was a natural duty in this time of strain undoubtedly, if each day a few simple breathing and stretching exercises were practised it would promote fitness'.<sup>26</sup> And again in August Cora noted in the minute book, 'It was every woman's national duty to try to make herself as fit as possible to stand up to the stress and strain today'.<sup>27</sup> Citizenship for women, required fitness of mind and body. In 1941, Cora was writing that exercises benefited one in that 'old clothes are set off to greater advantage', indicating that there were

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<sup>22</sup>There appear to have been only two or so members who were knitting outside of the hours set aside on Wednesday afternoons, and Cora was not one of them, in fact she frequently failed to attend the meetings. Tennant has written of the Auckland Ladies' Benevolent Society, 'In practice, the symbolic importance of this particular philanthropic community of women was always more significant than the actual amount of charitable assistance it delivered.' The same is true for Cora's Bees. M. Tennant, 'Woman's Peculiar Mission : Ladies' Benevolence in the New Zealand Setting' in B. Brookes and D. Page ed., Communities of Women : Historical Perspectives, Dunedin, 2002, pp.69-79, p.69.

<sup>23</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.5] [minutes] 'EPS' articles May 12-June 9 1942. Macmillan Brown Library ; 'New Order Literature (Christian)' Sept. 1-Sept. 15 1942 ; 'Flies and manure' 8th Dec. 1942.

<sup>24</sup>It was from interest in the physical culture exercises run at the Working Bees that the Keep Fit classes had eventuated in June of 1941. Ibid. [minutes] June 4th 1941.

<sup>25</sup>Following the ideas of a Dr Hadfield, Cora believed that having a 'purpose' was an essential part of mental health. For women, Cora explained appropriate purposes in terms of running a house efficiently, having a beautiful garden, writing, having a healthy family, and becoming a useful citizen. Cora Wilding Papers [4.4] [box 2] [misc.] 'Shirley'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. [minutes] June 9th 1940.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. [minutes] Aug. 27 1940.

more pragmatic reasons for the exercises than simple health ideals - although self-confidence and beauty were important parts of psychological health too.<sup>28</sup>

In a way, Cora's semi-official work done under the auspices of the League, such as the running of the Working Bees and the Gardening hapu, or the organising of Keep-Fit classes and Literary Competitions, represented the continuation of the ideals on which the League was established, more so than did the increasing bureaucracy experienced by the Sunlight League proper as a member of the National Federation of Health Camps. Cora had started the League by centring it in the over-riding ideologies which saw art as beneficial to human well-being; human health as involving the 'whole' self, and a democratic citizenship which included women, as being the healthiest form of existence. The key ideological contexts identified in this thesis being feminism, aesthetics and psychology. The camps, as have been discussed, were run along these lines, but so too were the Keep-fit Classes and Gardening Hapu, all of which had a feminist motivation in their organisation and were in line with Cora's understanding of both health and democracy. Cora was also a strong advocate of the use of murals in schools and other public places for their benefit regarding their aesthetic appeal, eventually writing a manual on murals for New Zealanders. Similarly Cora spoke to many women's groups and schools about the importance of health and the importance of art as a means to self-expression and to national identity, sometimes in reference to the Sunlight League, and sometimes she seems to have spoken on her own behalf.

Cora organised a Literary and Art Competition open to Servicemen and Women of the United Nations in 1945 which was also semi-official as far as the Sunlight League was concerned. This competition displayed Cora's understanding of feminism in terms of a post-suffrage ideal of citizenship and equality. Under class (ii) of the competition, servicemen and women were asked to write under the heading 'my country needs'.<sup>29</sup> One option dealt with 'colour prejudice', while another dealt with women taking a more active role in world affairs.<sup>30</sup> In a draft for the conditions of entry Cora wrote under the latter option -

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid. [minutes] June 4th 1941.

<sup>29</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] [misc.] 'Literary and Art Competition'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



Men sacrificed their lives to build a better world and the girls they would have married are now at school or university, and in the future, many will not have homes or children. Consequently, women will have their great opportunity to help humanity - provided they have the education and training. Our government has been on masculine principles and a balanced society needs the work of both men and women. Women's characteristics are common sense and the practical mind - consequently she might do valuable work in food administration, which up till now, has not been considered in terms of human need, but only in terms of money making and profits.<sup>31</sup>

She also recommended women working in architectural design, promoting human relationships and better education for children, ending with a quote from Pearl Buck which read 'Out of what they think and will, women can make tomorrow what they will. If they think big, they can make for the whole world, a victory out of peace.'<sup>32</sup> Cora was very disappointed with the standard of entries she received for the competition, but the ideas set out in the information regarding the competition show Cora to have been a proponent of the idea that women had a unique role to play within society - that women were by nature peaceful and rational creatures - which was an idea put forward by the Sunlight League in its early years, and was clearly present in the running of health camps.<sup>33</sup> It was also an idea that Cora supported throughout her life in her continued involvement in working towards world peace.

What we also see from the above text, is the kind of work being done by the Sunlight League, described in terms of work appropriate to women. Food, children and house-design were explicit concerns of the Sunlight League, which worked towards getting architects to consult women on the building of houses (which were to be built towards the sun), on the testing and regulating of the food industry, and as we have seen, on the education of children in good citizenship and health. Weight is given here to my interpretation of the Sunlight League as a women's group and loosely bound feminist organisation when this is taken into consideration, as does the fact that in its own time the League was considered a women's organisation on the same grounds as the National Council of Women (N. C. W.) and the Women's Division of

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>The competition itself, is an example of the way in which Cora understood writing as an art-form, to be a means to self expression and health and thus important for recently returned servicemen and women who might have been emotionally and physically scarred by their experiences at war.

Federated Farmers (W. D. F. F.) as well as the numerous other women's organisational bodies in existence at the time.<sup>34</sup>

While Cora was away from direct involvement with the Sunlight League, changes took place within the League regarding the running of health camps in light of new legislation. According to Margaret Tennant, the 1938 King George V Memorial Fund Act saw the beginning of the divisions in the Sunlight League as an organisational body develop. The Memorial Fund was set aside for 'permanent health camp[s], sited on land used exclusively for that purpose, whether occupied continuously or not'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly new restrictions regarding the running of health camps under Federation came into play, and camps now had to be authorised and committees were required to keep accounts and detail reasons for children attending camp with more information required on, for example, children's families.<sup>36</sup> All of this worked to professionalise the health camp phenomenon where camps like Cora's had been run on a voluntary basis and now involved waged workers - which to Cora, went against the very principles the camps were supposed to be run on.

Because the Memorial Fund required an exclusive committee for the health camps and an exclusive site for camps, the Sunlight League was at this time, undergoing threats to its identity. The League as a whole, as was discussed earlier, had a role which was far wider than simply running health camps. It stood for ideals of health and citizenship which saw it work in many areas of the community. To get funding for a permanent health camp, the Sunlight League needed to either solely run health camps, or to lose its capacity to run health camps while an independent health camp committee broke away from the League. Eventually the Sunlight League, amidst this turmoil, acquired the land at Glenelg for establishing a permanent camp. The League had been allocated finances by the King George V Memorial Fund in 1937, but it wasn't until Glenelg opened its doors in 1945 that the Sunlight League's ideal of a

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<sup>34</sup>Up-dates about the workings of the Sunlight League in the Christchurch Press were featured under the column 'For Women'. Baverstock Papers [iii5a][box 1] [newspaper] Press, n.d.. Macmillan Brown Library ; A. G. Telford wrote of the Sunlight League, regarding centenary celebrations for the N. C. W., '... but it was felt that, should the invitation be extended, the branches of the National Council should make it their responsibility, in co-operation with other women's organisations, of which ours is one, to extend hospitality and entertainment to such visitors during their tour.' Baverstock Papers [iii5A] [box 1] [correspondence] From A. G. Telford to Secretary of the Sunlight League, '14.5.39'. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>35</sup>Tennant, Children's Health the Nation's Wealth, p.125.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.127.

permanent site for a health camp was met - only it wasn't the Sunlight League which was to run this camp. To continue to get financial assistance from the Memorial Fund, the Health Camp Committee had to distance itself from the founding Sunlight League, and this it did - much to Cora's disgust.

Although it is unclear when Cora returned actively to Sunlight League affairs, she was involved with constitutional changes for the Health Camp Committee in 1938 and was again attending Annual Meetings by 1947. Cora apparently returned to an active role in Sunlight League Affairs because 'what was happening made [her] unhappy'.<sup>37</sup> The last Summer camp before her return had been a disgrace with even Dr Turbott speaking out on how the Camp Committee had fallen down. Cora, having been told that her ideas were out-of-date and largely irrelevant to the new move towards official intervention in the running of camps and moreover in the running of permanent camps, had given up on the other members of the Health Camp Committee.<sup>38</sup> Cora however, returned to the activities of the League with renewed belief in the initial aims of the Sunlight League showing that to her, citizenship and aesthetics were always at the heart of the League when she wrote:

Of course I realise that a permanent camp is different from the holidays[sic] camps, but the fundamentally[sic] things to get over to children are the same to try for, whether in permanent or holiday camp. Truth, goodness and beauty are the three great human values.<sup>39</sup>

It seems that the break was widening between the focus on the psychological approach to health that Cora had advocated and the physical approach found in the original camps run by Gunn and re-instated in camps overseen by the government bodies. The child had become neither social capital nor psychic being, but a number in the account book.

While much of the formalising of Camp Committees and consolidating of Federation principles went on in Cora's absence, she did try to remedy the situation via alterations to the Sunlight League Constitution on her return. In 1938, Cora attempted to get constitutional changes

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<sup>37</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [MB 183] [1.10] 'Correspondence 1944-53' [misc.]. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>They were also what Somerset had referred to as 'the three ultimate realities'. See the introductory quote to chapter one in this thesis. Cora Wilding Papers [1.10] [misc.]. Macmillan Brown Library.

passed regarding the Sunlight League Glenelg Committee which would see the Glenelg Committee having relative independence (specifically financial independence) within the Sunlight League, so long as it was to abide by clause 3b of the Sunlight League Constitution - on the reasons behind the running of health camps. Cora proposed that 'The Camp Commandant's approval and co-operation will be sought in regard to encouragement of children's garden plots, promotion of education in art, health or other matters which promote good democratic citizenship'.<sup>40</sup> Rather than this committee having relative independence however, the camp committee was to have complete independence and clause 13a was added to the Sunlight League Constitution beginning: 'There shall be a committee to be called the Christchurch Sunlight League Health Camp Committee (consisting of not more than 12 members and not less than three members of the Sunlight League)...'.<sup>41</sup> By July 1944, Cora was again attempting to reign in the Health Camp Committee, proposing an amendment to Clause 13a which would see the League and its Health Camp Committee in a relationship based on mutual co-operation.<sup>42</sup> Clearly Cora was beginning to feel the Sunlight League slip between her fingers, writing around this time,

Are there to be two separate societies both using the name of the Sunlight League, both being elected at the Sunlight League Annual Meeting, and yet with members of the Sunlight League declaring they are not members of the S.L., are not interested in its objects, and above all criticising efforts made to promote those objects.<sup>43</sup>

Apparently the Chairman of the Health Camps had almost blocked the children's art competition seeing it as not being relevant to the camps.<sup>44</sup> Cora on the other hand, explicitly believed in the art competition's relevance, referring to the objects of the League's constitution which clearly stated the goals as being an appreciation of beauty and the promotion of mental health.<sup>45</sup> She was also concerned that the publicity for the League was now solely for the

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<sup>40</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.9] [misc.] Friday 27 May 1938. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid. [misc.] July 2nd 1944.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. [misc.] 'Sunlight League'.

<sup>44</sup>Similarly it appears that Cora's attempts to get a solarium financed on the Southern Alps were undermined by splits within the committee, she wrote in a draft letter to Dr Watt of Dr McIntyre who believed that hospital treatment was adequate 'though he is a member of our Committee and whom we all like, he has been the stumbling block to any proposal to use our alps for heliotherapy for all these years.'. Cora Wilding Papers [1.18] [correspondence] From Cora Wilding to Dr Watt, Nov. 22. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>45</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.9] [misc.] 'Sunlight League'. Macmillan Brown Library.

health camps at the expense of the other committees of the League. Furthermore, Cora was completely disempowered within the League, with the Health Camp Committee Chairman telling her to cut costs for the Annual Meeting of the Sunlight League and the Camp Committee. As far as Cora was concerned, the Health Camp Committee had never had to change to an independent body to get finances and she had only supported the move as long as the Committee stayed true to the initial aims of the League, but now that Committee was breaking away and criticising the parent organisation.

While purchasing the Glenelg property was a big step forward towards the League's intention of running a permanent health camp, there had already been attempts made at organising a permanent site in the form of land bequeathed to the League by Ford Milton. The land at Birch Hill and Okuku which had formerly belonged to Milton, and then his wife upon his death, was to drive a wedge between the League as provider of Health Camps and its founding member. This is a point which has been overlooked in narratives regarding Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League, probably because the documents relating to the issue are somewhat convoluted and hard to follow. However, to fail to consider the role of the property at Birch Hill in the life of the Sunlight League is to fail to recognise the trigger for Cora's retirement from League affairs in 1951.<sup>46</sup> It represents the changing identity of the League which at once reflected a change in focus for the League from within - that it was now concerned primarily with health camps, which itself reflected the related changes in legislation which Tennant identified as being indicative of the beginning of the second phase of the Health Camp Movement. But this also reflected a change in the external circumstances - that the economic situation in New Zealand had improved, the wars were over, and in fact children were being 'better' looked after than in previous years.<sup>47</sup> The 1940s as a whole saw the League moving away from Cora's ideals as set out in the Sunlight League constitution, and saw the League transformed from a loosely bound feminist organisation primarily concerned with women and children, to being a bureaucratic body run by men as a financial measure.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Which is not to overlook the fact that she was no longer a young woman, in 1951 Cora turned 63.

<sup>47</sup>In a draft letter to Mabel Howard Cora acknowledged this change, largely due to child allowances. Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] [correspondence] From Cora Wilding to Mabel Howard, April 26th 1960. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>48</sup>The work done by members of the League was no longer on a voluntary basis - in 1936 an amendment to the Sunlight League constitution was passed which now saw pay as permissible via the inclusion of clause 25. It is

Birch Hill and Okuku, two adjacent sheep stations, were bequeathed to the Sunlight League by a man wishing to be known only as 'Children's Friend'. By 1946, Ford Milton (Children's Friend) had died and so had his wife, leaving the Canterbury sheep stations in the hands of the League. The will stipulated that the grounds were to be used to benefit children, specifically, to 'build up their [children under 12] mental and moral qualities' and encourage a love of country life.<sup>49</sup> These were clearly in line with the ideals of the Sunlight League as they had stood at the time the will had been formalised, but things had changed. On top of this, the properties were in a state of ill-repair and needed much work to see them in a state which the various government bodies would accept as being up to the standards required for health camps. During 1946 it had become apparent that the death duties were in excess of the actual worth of the property, the valuation had exceeded the carrying capacity of the land by 2000, which incurred an extra £6000 in taxation.<sup>50</sup> The properties had also been mistakenly valued as a single property which had incurred another £6000.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately the trustees had paid the duties on behalf of the League without consultation, which resulted in the League missing the deadline for objections, which in turn meant that they had to apply for a refund.<sup>52</sup> Communication it seems, was not a high point between the League and the trustees of the Estate. By 1948, the Sunlight League had found the death duties incurred from the properties to be crushing and attempts made by the League to get the Government to grant them relief from the duties had been unsuccessful - as late as 1960 Cora was still writing to Mabel Howard, Minister of Welfare for Women and Children, to pass a special act in parliament regarding Birch Hill, nine years after Cora had officially retired from the League.<sup>53</sup>

Cora became the Lady Superintendent of the Ford Milton Memorial Children's Home at Birch Hill in the late 1940s and she became involved in the problems which obtaining this property had created. Problems ensued from Cora's end (who was now living at Birch Hill) because it

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worth noting that this change was passed in a meeting which Cora was not attending.

<sup>49</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] [correspondence] From Cora to Mabel Howard, April 26th 1960. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>50</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.10] [correspondence] From Sunlight League of New Zealand to Trustees late E. B. Milton, 4th March 1946. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.23] [report] 'Report Year Ending Sept. 1948'. Macmillan Brown Library ; [correspondence] From Cora to Mabel Howard, April 26th 1960.

was hard to find staff who were willing and qualified to help at the camps, and it was hard to get the children (boys) that far out from Christchurch in the first place. Cora wrote an S.O.S. letter to Mr Rhodes who was a member of the Sunlight League Council, asking him to second her motion regarding the appointment of a Mr Smith at Birch Hill.<sup>54</sup> While being concerned that her speaking out at a Committee meeting may hurt Mr McKellar's feelings, she was worried that Mr Smith was unsuitable for the position given him at Birch Hill because it was rumoured that he had engaged in some inappropriate behaviour in his former position at Woodend, and to this end she wanted him dismissed from Birch Hill. At the same time however, she was concerned that without a man at Birch Hill, camps could not be run because the psychological implications of putting boys under the control of a woman were undesirable.

In general it seems that Birch Hill was unsuccessful in its first five years because it was impossible to staff and consequently those children that were taken there, on 'holiday' rather than 'health' camps, ran amuck.<sup>55</sup> The more overt problem with the property at Birch Hill lay in the rules stipulated in the will. The will required that children under 12 be taught to appreciate country life and while Cora saw this as being paramount to fulfilling the terms of the will, other members of the Sunlight League and Birch Hill Committee were less than worried. During 1947 Cora worked towards getting the site up and running, and in an attempt to fulfill the requirements of the will, wrote to the Royal Agricultural Society of London seeking advice from Lord Bledisloe as to the viability of getting girl children between 11-12 years sent out to Birch Hill from Britain for education.<sup>56</sup> Specifically, Cora had asked if there were any orphans available of good stock to export to New Zealand. The response was clearly negative, stating that if the orphans were of good stock, they invariably already had people willing to look after them, the only children uncatered for were either 'illegitimate', having 'some mental or moral kink', or 'problem' children.<sup>57</sup> Thwarted in this plan, in 1948 Cora attempted to get permission to run Birch Hill as a training camp for young farmers. For this scheme to work however, she needed to have the will altered to allow for boys of 15 years to attend, as well as

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid. [draft correspondence] From Cora to Mr Rhodes, April 3rd.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. [draft correspondence] From Cora to Miss Mabel Howard, April 26th 1960. The holiday camps run during these years appear to have been financed by the Heritage organisation as well as the T.O.C.H..

<sup>56</sup>Cora Wilding Papers [1.10] [correspondence] From Alec Hobson to Cora, 16th June 1947. Macmillan Brown Library.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

having government approval. The Minister of Education's approval was sought and a deputation was eventually sent to Birch Hill to consider the proposal. By July of 1948 the deputation had met and unfortunately the scheme was turned down 'in view of the capital expenditure and annual lay-out required for a relatively small number of cadets'.<sup>58</sup> It had taken almost a year of letter writing and committee meeting to get this very disappointing result. While training boys to be farmers fulfilled Cora's ideals regarding the Sunlight League's beliefs on health and well-being, it also fulfilled the clauses of the will. The other members of the League Committees had considered mortgaging the property, selling it on, just plain allowing it to lie idle or even ignoring the will altogether rather than attempting to fulfil the wishes of Ford Milton.

While Cora was trying to keep the different bodies of the League together, working towards the fulfilment of the obligations the League had towards the will of Ford Milton, and trying to continue to work towards the betterment of the race through a closer relationship with the land (and thus beauty), she was also experiencing increasing alienation from within the League. Eventually, getting more and more disheartened about the work of what remained of the Sunlight League, matters came to a head at a series of committee meetings in mid 1949. It is hard to tell what exactly took place at these meetings, but clearly Cora was not pleased. Mr McCaskill wrote to Cora in April 1949 hoping that Cora would remain at Birch Hill, saying 'Whether McKellar's offer will make any difference I do not know but if you had burned your boats at the meeting I felt that no more effort would be made on behalf of the children for possibly 5 years'.<sup>59</sup> Should the Committee have persisted in their plans (whatever those plans may have been) Cora was prepared to abandon both Birch Hill and the Sunlight League. In the last remaining reference made to this situation, Cora wrote in a draft letter,

Again I was not very pleased about the motion which I spoke out against, and was ignored, at the cutting down [of] trees on the homestead lands [which was] entrusted entirely to the Farm Management Committee.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly Cora's toes were being firmly stood on and she resented it.

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid. [correspondence] From Gordon Junes to Cora, 27th July 1948.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. [correspondence] From McCaskill to Cora, 4th April 1949.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid. [draft correspondence] From Hon. Sec., July 19.



If I am permitted to do allot[sic] of hard work under directions of men - most experienced in farming yet who have not had the experience in garden[ing that Mr] Reese, Mr McLeod and even myself in a lesser degree have had, I am beginning to wonder seriously if it would be wiser to consider resigning the secretaryship and if I did it would also mean the other besides.<sup>61</sup>

While it appears that the final motivation in her abandonment of the League which she had worked so hard for for twenty years was an issue over who had the right to decide which trees were cut down and which stayed, the incident reflected the changes which had been taking place within the League over the last fifteen years. Cora had tried to keep it together, but the League as a unified body working towards a unified cause was falling apart. Where Cora had believed that everyone had a role to play within the wider society, the leaders of the Sunlight League Committees apparently saw Cora as having no role to play within the decision-making process and overlooked her considerable experience and talents - apparently the League was no longer run along the kind of democratic lines which Cora believed in. Although the Sunlight League continued as an organisational body into the 1950s, Cora had abandoned it, and Birch Hill by 1951, by which time she had moved to Kaikoura.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>The Sunlight League was still running in 1957. Cora Wilding Papers [1.10] [misc.] 'The Sunlight League of New Zealand Inc.'. Macmillan Brown Library.

Conclusion:

*Intensity/purpose/harmony - Truth/goodness/beauty*

This thesis has illustrated the matrixial content of the past, in that ideologies always inter-relate with place, bodies always inter-relate with myth, and historical contexts always inter-relate with personal narratives - where each always changes and is changed by, all. Vernon Lee's aesthetics explained Cora's belief in the importance of art appreciation for health, where the specific context of Christchurch, New Zealand, offered not only a specific landscape that Cora could utilise for those ends, but also a receptive intellectual climate that could support her ideals and efforts. Post-suffrage feminism, similarly, explained Cora's motivations in specifically concerning herself with the well-being of women as citizens, where inter-war discourses surrounding nationalism and Empire ensured that those concerns were with girl-children, or, 'women citizens in the making'. Aesthetics, feminism, eugenics, nationalism, Imperialism, psychology, World Wars, and state intervention in voluntary organisations, all played their part in the matrix which was the past for Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League, and it is this site of interaction which allows Cora to exist as a figure with historical agency and furthermore, as a figure of her time. When this kind of view of the past is allowed for, Cora's role within historical narratives as a figure of historical note can be reclaimed - not just as the founder of the Y. H. A. N. Z. and an organiser of health camps, but as a woman artist struggling to find her footing somewhere between a modern art world abroad and colonial feminism at home; as a woman aesthete within the masculine world of the Christchurch elite; and as a feminist who worked towards an ideal of female citizenship for New Zealand girls.

Vernon Lee wrote that intensity, purposefulness, and harmony were the three things required for the health of human beings, and that these three needs could be met through the aesthetic experience. This triad existed almost as a mantra for the period covered in this thesis as these ideals were seen as constructing the highest state of perfection, in this instance the state of democracy. The work of art was, through Bell's 'significant form', intended to exhibit an intensity of line, a purposefulness of form, and a harmony of line, form and colour where each element was instrumental to the whole. The psychologically healthy individual was understood to display '... a capacity for friendship, adequate courage, self-confidence, and a capacity to love someone and/or something outside the self ...', in other words, to live harmoniously with others and have a purposefulness of action and an intensity of thought.<sup>1</sup> The whole self was understood as reflecting similar democratic ideals where the mind and body both needed to be balanced and active. Democracy itself was understood to require individuals who were working towards the greater good for all, or, working with a degree of purpose and intensity to achieve an harmonious world order. Similarly, the citizen feminist ideal required women to live their lives to the utmost intensity as human beings, with a specific purpose *as* women, working towards world peace (harmony). In a sense these ideals rested in an understanding of the true, the good and the beautiful, in that intensity was a *trueness* to self, purposefulness was to work towards the *good* of the whole, and harmony was close to being the very definition of *beauty*. Illness in the self, the body, the state or the world, came from idleness, impotence, and discord and in its worst form resulted in war. Cora understood these three ideals as being at the heart of healthy human existence and as we have seen, the triad was relevant to both her experiences with art, and with the League.

The fact that this basic triad could be applied to diverse ideological contexts - to feminism, art, health and Empire - illustrates that 'boundaries' were far from being categorically stable truths. Art, health, and feminism especially, as was mentioned in the introduction to this work, have often been seen historically as somewhat incompatible as bodies of knowledge, and consequently mutually exclusive as providers of identity for the individuals who have engaged with them. Because of this, as an historical figure, Cora Wilding has been under-valued even though she was involved in numerous activities that have been prioritised within the historical narrative. In traditional historical accounts Cora has been misrepresented because as we have

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<sup>1</sup> Bevan-Brown, p.7.

seen, she has had at least two active identities that have clashed as bounded, gendered identities, and this has resulted in the dominant representation of her being that of the health activist at the expense of her identity as an artist, when she clearly was a woman artist engaging in contemporary trends within the arts. Similarly the prevailing idea that Art and Health were opposing knowledges has disempowered her, as she has slipped beyond sight in the ideological divide that has resulted. The boundary that divides artist proper and aesthetically-minded-individual has also worked to her disadvantage within the New Zealand art historical narrative, as has the boundary between feminist and pro-women-individual within broader historical narratives. Cora's engagement with the landscape myth in New Zealand's art history still needs to be reconsidered in dominant narratives so that her works can be reclaimed and her identity as an artist consolidated. An understanding of boundaries as fixed, universal and unchanging sites of difference and exclusion then, worked to disempower Cora as an historical figure who existed beyond the confines of bounded sites, and it is this structure that this thesis has attempted to undermine. In a way this work has engaged with earlier celebratory narratives of women's lives in that it has attempted to recover Cora from the intra-border darkness where history has left her through both omission and the drawing up of boundaries intended to exclude, and in turn celebrate her for having existed in that very capacity.

Cora's ideological position was a mixture of the discourses of art, health, and feminism. Cora was a woman who believed in beauty, and she believed in the goodness of beauty. She was an artist who engaged not only in the art of early modernism in 1930s New Zealand, but also in the 'art of harmonious living'. Ideals of first wave feminism led her to turn to Vernon Lee's understanding of the 'beauty of health' to provide a role for herself within the arts as a subject gendered feminine, and in turn form the Sunlight League of New Zealand. Cora was able to take Vernon Lee's ideas about aesthetics, which constructed art as beneficial for the human being in its totality, and apply them to the raw medium of the female youth of Christchurch by running health camps, keep-fit classes and gardening groups under the auspices of the League. After Cora left the League, she continued to utilise art, promoting it as a universal language which symbolised democratic principles, to work towards peace. The League itself, became progressively removed from Cora's ideals of aesthetics and feminist citizenship and was

increasingly caught up in the bureaucracy of health camp federation. The Sunlight League Health Camps further represented the overlapping of discourses in that the ideals of light and nationalism within the arts were applied to children who it was hoped would in a sense become embodiments of the landscape - themselves becoming aesthetically nationalised by their exposure to the natural environment.

The Sunlight League was also done a disservice by previous historians through the use of rigidly defined ideological boundaries. The League was constructed as a eugenically driven body that primarily existed to run health camps, but just as Cora Wilding's ideological position was a manifestation of a unique merging of particular contexts, so too was the Sunlight League a merging of particular contexts, both ideological and personal. The Sunlight League was a hybrid of a number of international organisations which prioritised sunlight as a healer and prioritised the spreading of knowledge for the betterment of society. Similarly the League was an organisational body made up of sometimes disparate individuals which in turn gave it an unstable identity through time, its nature changing as its membership did. In this way, while the League was officially headed by many prominent men from Christchurch, it was also a loosely bound feminist organisation working for the good of women and girl-children, a factor which reflected the proportionately greater female membership. The League then, while existing in an intellectual climate which favoured ideals of social Darwinism, and entertaining a membership that may have as individuals favoured eugenics to varying degrees, was far from being solely driven by eugenic beliefs. Rather it was, as representative of its membership, driven by feminism, eugenics, aesthetics, psychology, medicine, philanthropy and sometimes even friendship and mutual support.

An understanding of the existence of ideological border-spaces in place of categorical boundaries then, has offered an understanding of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League which is far richer than could otherwise be given. Whether or not defining Art, Health and Feminism in terms which exclude each other is valid and helpful in some contexts, it certainly appears that in this context it has proven to limit subjects and their potential roles within the historical narrative. In the time-frame in question - specifically at the time of the League's formation, it appears that boundaries were in flux, that the skin was, rather than being an indicator of a

closed system, a marker of wo/man's inter-relationship with his/her environment; that the ideology of art could be applied to the physical reality of the human body as well as to the illusive psyche; that minds and bodies were joined in fact *by* an understanding of the human being as a set of creative energies and forces for good. And feminism, rather than being a narrowly defined first wave that centred on the vote, was a diverse set of motivations and beliefs that could be manipulated to fit any given context, just as all ideologies can. A focus on a single aspect of the life of Cora Wilding limited the richness of her story within the historical narrative, a story which continues beyond the scope of this analysis, and the restrictions of this text. All three contexts analysed, but specifically the interrelationships between art, health and feminism, are important factors to consider in a discussion of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League. This is of course not to say that the interpretations offered here are exhaustive and complete, just that they are valid and illustrative. Subjects such as Cora and the Sunlight League then, live in the space between theory and reality - they exist in and rightly belong in, the matrixial border-spaces of the past.

## Appendix A

9-19 May 1971, C.S.A. Gallery Christchurch - Retrospective Exhibition

### New Zealand Section:

- 1 Mrs Wilding 1929 sketch NFS
- 2 Franz Josef 1929 NFS
- 3 Frederick Wilding Esq. NFS
- 4 Franz Josef 1929 \$150
- 5 Broom Lake Taupo 1925 \$60
- 6 Horses Kowhai River bed c.1962 \$60
- 7 Waitaki NFS
- 8 Rotorua Model Village 1920 \$60
- 9 Maori Boys Bathing 1920 \$50
- 10 Bealey NFS
- 11 Coromandel Peninsular c.1949 \$60
- 12 Mission House Auckland NFS
- 13 Princess Te Puea 1919 \$40
- 14 Dining at the Pier c.1965 \$35
- 15 Kaikoura NFS
- 16 Coromandel Peninsular 1930 \$80
- 17 Arthurs Pass c.1930 NFS
- 18 From Kaikoura Peninsular c.1956 \$60
- 19 Mt Cook NFS
- 20 Making Craypots 1965 \$25
- 21 Stormy Sea, Old Boat Sheds \$40
- 22 Old Windmill, Auckland NFS
- 23 Mt Egmont 1930 NFS
- 24 West Coast c.1930 NFS

### Italy

- 25 San Gimignano, Tuscany 1920 \$100
- 26 Lago di Como 1924 \$30
- 27 Italian Country Woman c.1924 \$70
- 28 Ancient Greek Temple c.1924 \$30
- 29 Farm Building Sicily NFS

Africa

- 33 Moorish Bread Seller c.1925 \$30
- 34 Maerakech Atlas M. Lent by Frederick Wilding Esq. NFS
- 35 Smoking Hashish Tangier 1922 \$50
- 36 Tailor Boys NFS
- 37 Menaggio Lake Como NFS
- 38 Walls of Maerakech c.1923 \$35

Europe

- 39 Maison Carre Nimes France 1924 \$35
- 40 Waiting for Turn of Tide c.1922 \$40
- 41 Swedish Farm House c.1927 NFS
- 42 Taormina Sicily NFS
- 43 Lettojane Fishing Village \$25

Japanese

- 44 Todaiji Diabub, Nara 1958 \$30
- 45 Boys, Festival 1958 Lent by John Wilding Esq. NFS
- 46 Koto 1958 \$30
- 47 Nikko Woodland Garden 1958
- 48 Nikko, Japan c.1958 \$30
- 49 Japanese Shrine, Kyoto c.1958 \$30

New Mexico

- 50 Navaho Girl c.1923 \$40
- 51 Taos 1923 \$25

Spain

- 52 Court of Myrtles Alhambra 1923 \$35
- 53 Gipsy Boys, Granada 1924 \$35
  
- 59 Burgos Cathedral, Spain 1925 \$50

California

- 60 Santa Barbara California NFS
- 61 Spanish Mission Church c.1924 \$25
- 62 Monastery Gd. Old Mission, San Juandi Capistrano c.1922 \$25
- 63 Old Spanish Mission Church 1922 \$30
- 64 Good Home Maker 1923 \$40
- 65 Early Mission Church 1922 \$30
- 66 Cypresses Monterey 1922 \$30



## 67 Tiburoni 1921 NFS

Ceylon

68 Botnee Temple Candy \$35

69 Buddhist Temple Ceylon \$35

Tahiti

70 Mo'orea, Island \$35

71 Suez Canal c.1913 \$8

72 Basque Village c.1913 \$8

73 Fuenterabia, Spain 1912 \$8

74 Pyrenees Village 1913 \$8

75 Near Interlaken 1913 \$5

76 Volendan Fiskerman, Canal and Windmill 1913 \$12

77 French-Spanish Frontier 1923 \$8

78 English Village (Herts) 1912 \$8

79 Pays Basque 1913 \$4

80 Boy Selling Flowers, Arles 1913 \$6

81 Teneriffe 1906 \$4

82 Husband and Wife 1913 \$10

83 Swiss Village Church 1913 \$5

84 Frontier Village Spain 1912 \$6

85 Carcasson France 1913 \$5

86 Early Mission Church, Santa Barbara 1920 \$12

87 Mexican Girl 1920 \$20

88 Fish Stall on the Pier 1921 \$15

89 Fez Morocco 1924 \$15

90 Oxen, Spain 1923 \$15

91 Threshing, Spain 1923 \$15

92 Castilian Peasants 1923 \$20

93 Arab Village Tangiers 1928 \$15

94 Camels Atlas Mts 1928 NFS

95 Manuka Southland 1919 \$15

96 Pohutu Geyser 1919 \$15

97 Winter Sunset Kaikoura 1969 \$15

98 Puhi Puhi, Kaikoura 1970 \$25

99 Gulat Fountain Ngaruawahia \$10

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